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THE LETTER AS A DRAMATIC DEVICE IN

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Background of the Letter

Although the Age of Elizabeth is frequently accounted the most glorious and perhaps the most significant era of English history, the dissemination of news and information during the period seems to have been slow, costly, and tiresome in comparison with modern methods. Now the very ether carries news throughout the world; then the speed of a horse or of a sailing vessel was the time measure. News traveled by word of mouth or by letter. Manuscript collections which have survived give testimony to the extreme importance of the letter to the people of the sixteenth century. The Egerton papers, the letters of Sir John Harrington, Philip Gawdy, Richard Brakenbury, to name a few, show the vitality of the letter.

Although the Renaissance was a particularly rich period which has contributed much to artistic and social life since that time, it did not invent the epistolary

form. The ancients attributed the invention to Atossa, daughter of Cyprus, but recent cuneiform findings indicate that the letter is as old as writing itself.[1] With the rise of intellectual and sophistic pursuits in Greece after the Peloponnesian Wars, the letter developed as a form of literature, and from the first, oratory and epistolary composition were considered parts of the same art. Later the Romans developed the art of the letter and used it as a means of attaining a certain immortality. Cicero (106-43 B.C.) was the first with his collected letters, followed by Horace, Seneca, Pliny the Younger, and others. Later instruction by the church fathers in the epistle brought to many of their letters what has since been designated "divine inspiration."

The poetic letter from the time of Horace to the present became a tradition: Fortunatus in the sixth century, the poets at the court of Charlemagne, and Raginaldo in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Usually the verse letter is a love letter. The elegy of the Alexandrian poets, being subjective and addressed to an individual, may stand in the long line of poetic love messages. Ovid 43 B.C.-16 A.D.) transformed the elegy into the letter.

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[1] For the history of the letter in continental literature I am indebted to Charles E. Kany, The Beginnings of the Epistolary Novel in France, Italy, and Spain (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1937).

The Heroides containing narrative love letters and replies became the origin for the epistolary novel, and at the same time introduced the letter to fictive literature. The influence of the Heroides was felt throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and in the Renaissance served as epistolary models. Lovers used the form in the Metamorphoses, the Amores, and the Ars Amatoria. The Provençal love letter of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries shows the awareness of the Heroides. The verse messages between the members of the various schools of poetry gave the letter form considerable popularity. Noteworthy of those in the sphere of the Heroides is Boccaccio whose Fiammetta, called an elegy, is actually a letter.

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries figures well-known for their poetic correspondence are Guillaume de Machaut (1284-1370), Christine de Pisan (1364-1430), and Charles d'Orleans (1394-1465).

Meanwhile prose composition included the letter form.

> About a century and a half after Ovid, Lucian (ca. 125-200 A.D.), one of the first masters of fictional prose, composed his four Saturnalian letters, which very definitely contain the germ of the social novel in letter form.[1]

Rhetoric was revived in Greece and Asia Minor by the rhet-

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[1] Ibid., pp. 6-7.

oricians or Sophists. This movement filled the empire with Greek schoolmen who taught writing by means of many prose letters. One of the leaders of this group was Alciphron, who wrote many epistolary tales.

> In the letters of the Sophists stories are no longer confined to a single missive or even two, as in Ovid. Here notably in Alciphron, we occasionally have a rounded episode related in an exchange of several letters between two writers or more. The unfolding of the plot in the series of missives is, at its best, superior to that in the Heroides, though the balance of motive, emotion, and character is less in evidence. . . . . .
> . . . . . .
> The epistolary novel in ancient times reached but a limited stage of development. The productions that attained the highest level are probably such of Alciphron's letters as may properly be called epistolary tales.[1]

Throughout the Middle Ages in the use of epistles certainly there was no lag, especially in communications religious and political; however, the romances of chivalry did not make much use of the letter. In 1444, there appeared an early Italian Renaissance novel, The Historia de duobus amantibus or Eurialus and Lucretia by Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini; this work makes considerable use of the letter in the working out of the plot. It has frequently been seen as an early source for The Two Gentlemen of Verona. "Aeneas Silvius is one of the first prose story-tellers in modern literature to use the letter device."[2]

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[1] Ibid., pp. 8-9.

[2] Ibid., p. 39.

"Italy to the Tudor imagination was the golden land of romance."[1] Thus, even the letter-book "set foorth in English" by William Fulwood, The Enimie of Idlenesse (1568) contains many model letters of fifteenth century Italian writers: Angelo Poliziano, Marsilia Ficino, Giorgio Merula, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola.[2]

In Spain too the letter form had made progress in literature as well as in the field of correspondence. Poets of the Castilian court carried on poetic correspondence.

> In 1446 Fernando de la Torre dedicated his Libro de las veinte cartas e quistiones to the Infanta Doña Leonor de Aragon. It contains debates on religious and amatory dilemmas, moralizing letters, and letters of farewell from the author's friends and relatives, nearly all of them with replies.[3]

Letter collections began to develop; one of the most outstanding of these collections was the moral and didactic Epistolas familiares (1539-42) of Antonio de Guevara, which makes use of the ideas of the Senecan letters. During the Renaissance Seneca was of prime interest; he was admired and imitated; men felt a sympathetic response to his attitudes and techniques.[4] The works of Guevara were of importance in

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[1] Felix E. Schelling, Foreign Influences in Elizabethan Plays (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1923), p. 38.

[2] Mary Augusta Scott, Elizabethan Translations from the Italian (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1916), p. 348.

[3] Kany, op. cit., p. 49.

[4] Madeleine Doran, Endeavors of Art: A Study of Form in Elizabethan Drama (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1954), pp. 15-16.

the development of Euphuism by Lyly.

> The works of Guevara, turned into English by five or six different translators, had a considerable vogue and acclimatized this extraordinary style in Great Britain. One of his writings especially, "The golden boke of Marcus Aurelius, emperour," enjoyed a very great popularity; it was translated by Lord Berners in 1532, and by Sir Thomas North in 1557, and went through many editions. The moral dissertations of which it is full enchanted serious minds; the unusual language of Spain delighted frivolous souls.[1]

In France in the sixteenth century the adaptations of Italian novelle show the popularity of the letter.

> Boisteau and Belle-Forest, for example, in their version of Bandello's tales called Histoires tragiques, modified the original considerably, omitting elements that seemed undesirable and adding moral dissertations, long speeches, sonnets, and letters. . . . The Histoires tragiques contains letters either wholly lacking in Bandello or only briefly mentioned but never set off typographically from the rest of the narrative. In the French translation the letters are always set off conspicuously, and thus made to display the importance intended for them by the author.[2]

The use of the letter, however, as an integral part of the story developed in the romances of the sixteenth century. Although the letter usually is used for the psychological delineation of character, it became useful in this adventurous type of literature in Il Peregrino by Caviceo in 1508. In Spain there appeared in prose an epistolary novel, Processo de cartas de amores que entre dos amantes passaron by Juan de Segura (1548).[3]

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[1] J. J. Jusserand, The English Novel in the Time of Shakespeare (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1903), pp. 106-7.

[2] Kany, op. cit., p. 61.

[3] Ibid., pp. 64-69.

Meanwhile, in England the epistolary form was used in communication and in fictive literature. During the Old English period the letter form was known.

> The English did not cultivate prose as an art form until they became acquainted with Latin literature, which gave them both sources and models for prose works of art. These sources and models, chiefly compositions of Christians though they were, had maintained the traditional great prose genres: history, philosophy, and oratory. In addition, minor genres like the epistle were represented.[1]

Aelfric of the tenth and eleventh centuries wrote pastoral letters in prose. Certainly even the famous English Ancrene Riwle of the twelfth century seems to affect the epistolary style. During the Middle Ages and Renaissance in England there were political, commercial, personal, and social reasons for correspondence as exist today. The collection of the Paston letters alone indicates that among the educated upper class letter writing was a part of life. The letters of the humanists give evidence of the importance of the form in critical endeavors. The famous news-letters of the Fuggers emphasize the fact that what is now food for press, radio, and television traveled by letter in the sixteenth century. These letters by professional clerks were sent to the House of Fugger from various parts of the world. Sometimes they repeated only gossip and sometimes gave eye-

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[1] Albert C. Baugh (ed.), A Literary History of England (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1948), p. 96.

witness accounts.[1] That they were a product of this same era is noteworthy since the letter as a form of literature held a position of importance. To some extent, it took the place of the essay, novel, and argumentative treatise.[2] Critical theory on English poetry found expression in the letters exchanged between Harvey and Spenser in 1579-80. The open letter of E. K. to Gabriel Harvey introduced "the New Poet." Spenser's own letter to Sir Walter Raleigh "expounding his whole intention in the course of this worke," The Faerie Queene, is another example. Greene strays from the narrative form when he concludes Greene's Groatsworth of Wit with the well-known letter to his "fellow scholars about this city."

The development of the letter as a literary genre capable of standing by itself or of being incorporated in other forms gained an impetus from a source exclusively its own. That achievement was established in part through the formularies of the Middle Ages and Renaissance. The manuals of the sixteenth century are of basic importance to this study.

As early as the ninth century a skill in correspond-

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[1] Victor von Klarwill, The Fugger News-Letter (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1926), p. xiii.

[2] Elbert N. S. Thompson, Literary Bypaths of the Renaissance (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1924), p. 31.

ence was a requirement for churchmen.[1] In the Middle Ages letter writing was organized into a system.

> First, numerous collections by Cicero, Seneca, Pliny, and the Italian humanists were compiled and copied again and again. Later, treatises and textbooks on epistolography appeared. These books of rule were not based, as one might suppose, on the earlier collections of letters; instead, the theory was simply an adaptation of the already accepted principles of oratory. Teachers of correspondence flourished, and in the schools established by Charlemagne the ars dictaminis, as it was called made up a part of the curriculum.[2]

One of the tenets of the humanists' endeavor was the broadening of education beyond the confines of the religious interests. One of the results of that movement was the development of handbooks for improvement in many fields.

> The most obvious instruments of this education were of course the treatises on conduct, which abounded in an infinite variety throughout the period. . . . The great multiplication of handbooks which sought to guide the uninitiated over the hazardous seas of social progress was largely stimulated by the demands of middle-class readers, whose desire for manuals teaching the proper way of life and the correct procedure therein was never satisfied.[3]

One of the best known formularies of the early Renaissance was the De Ratione Conscribendi Epistolas Liber by Erasmus which was based on earlier models. Other well known ones were those by Vives and Macropedius. These books

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 92.

[3] Ibid., pp. 92-93.

defined the letter, set up principles of letter writing, and gave examples of letters according to type. Letters were classified as to subject: persuasive, encomiastic, judicial, demonstrative, and familiar. The letter was arranged in sequence: exordium, narratio, propositio, confirmatio, conjuratio, and peroratio.[1] Collections of letters of the Latin writers were used as textbooks for epistolography. Imitation of these classical models became the basic course of study in the schools as recommended by such educators as Roger Ascham, Richard Mulcaster, and William Kemp.[2] The pupil was required to compose letters in an ancient language using as authorities for expression the written works of the classical writers. A good deal of the form was traditional, as the beginning and ending of the epistle, and certain phrases were repeated in the school exercise. In the schools this method of learning the letter through a study of Latin models continued for some time.

> Charles Hoole (1660) requires Letter-writing in the fourth Form. The text-book should be Sturm's editions of Cicero's Letters. . . . The method is to be that of double translation. The acquiring of style is a difficult matter, so that Hoole translated a Century of Select Epistles from Tully and other choice authors, 'making the English answer to the Latin, period by period. And there I cause them to write over, and in so doing, to take notice of the placing of every word, and its manner of signification.' Then they were to write down the English and Latin together. Afterwards

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Shakespeare's England (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1917), I, 235-56.

> they wrote the English translation by itself, and ten days afterwards they were to try to turn it back again into good Latin.[1]

The rise of commerce in the Renaissance brought about the emergence of the middle class, and in England under the Tudors the ascent of the bourgeoisie was accelerated.[2] When the middle class became powerful enough to have a voice, it also became powerful enough to hold a pen.

> It has been frequently observed that a period of expansion and prosperity is normally marked by the appearance of a flourishing crop of handbooks for the use of the rising bourgeoisie.[3]
>
> Prosperous merchants, thrifty tradesmen, all that increasing multitude of citizens who made up a commercial class ambitious for advancement, were eager for self-improvement. . . . Since, however, the citizen had less time and means than the courtier for attaining his ends, he required speedy methods of instruction and usable compendiums of facts. The answer to his demands was the handbook, the printed guide, the Tudor and Stuart counterpart of the modern fifteen-easy-lessons which lead to bourgeois perfection. What the schools did not or could not accomplish, the citizen attempted to do for himself by private study of a convenient manual. The day of handbook learning for the generality of men had arrived.[4]

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[1] Foster Watson, The English Grammar Schools to 1660: their Curriculum and Practice (Cambridge: University Press, 1908), pp. 413-14.

[2] Louis B. Wright, Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1935), pp. 2-5.

[3] Louis B. Wright, "Handbook Learning of the Renaissance Middle Class," Studies in Philology, XXVIII (1931), 273.

[4] Wright, Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England, p. 121.

The need for help in letter writing was particularly great because the epistolary style followed Ciceronian and Italian models and because the bourgeois Elizabethan was not educated to write in the style demanded by convention. In our times when the daily arrival of the postman and the corner mailbox are recognized as a part of daily life, it is difficult for us to realize that not until the sixteenth century was there any widespread effort made to give the knowledge of letter writing in English to the masses. At that time the interest in letter writing was in the social consciousness of the people. No doubt it is significant that the first law dealing with the post was passed by Parliament in 1591.[1]

The earliest extant English letter manual was that of William Fulwood, The Enimie of Idlenesse: Teaching a perfect platforme how to indite Epistles and Letters of all sortes: as well by answers as otherwise: no less profitable than pleasant (1568). In the preface to the 1578 edition Fulwood gave as his purpose:

> This cunning clearke hath smal neede of a teacher. It is the unskilfull scholer that wanteth instructions. Mine onely intent therefore at this instant is to place doune such praecepts, and set foorth such instructions, as may (in mine opinion) best serve to edifie the ignorant; and those not unprofitable, but very needfull. The matter that I meane to intreat of, I have intituled, The Enimie of Idlenesse. It consisteth chiefuly uppon sundrie necessarie instructions and examples, for the

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[1] "Post and Postal Service," Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. 18, (1953).

> inditing and composing of Epistles & Letters, whiche title I have thought convenient to be added thereunto, for that not onely, when weightie business and urgent affaires require, it may stand thee in good steede: but also at idle times, when opportunities permitteth, for the avoyding of idlenesse (the capitall enimie to all good exercise, & common consumer of youth,) this woorke teacheth thee in what sorte thou mayest (I say at such vacant times) take thy penne in hande and gratifie thy friend with some prettie or pleasant conceite.[1]

Fulwood's hope "to edifie the ignorant" must have been satisfied considerably since the book passed through seven editions by the end of the century.

Another popular English letter-writer, A Panoplie of Epistles, Or, a looking Glasse for the unlearned, was Gathered and translated out of Latine into English (1576) by Abraham Fleming was again addressed to the uneducated masses.

> To the unlearned I doe likewise offer it, as sufficient furniture to arme and enable them against ignoraunce. . . . To such a one I give counsel to passe & repasse, to view and review, to take down and put on, to exercise and use, such weapons as he shall finde in this our Panoplie or house of furniture. . . .[2]

The English Secretorie--Wherein is contained a perfect Method for the inditing of all manner of Epistles and Familiar Letters, together with their diversities, enlarged by examples under their severall Tytles. In which is layd

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[1] Wright, Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England, p. 139.

[2] Katherine Gee Hornbeak, "The Complete Letter-Writer in English," Smith College Studies in Modern Languages, XV (1934), p. 13.

forth a Pathwaye, so apt, plainer and easier, to any learner's capacity, as like wherof hath not at any time heretofore beene delivered. Now first devised and newly published by Angel Daye (1586)[1] was one of the most popular of the letter-books for the scholars and others looking for models. By 1626 there were eight editions.

> Like his predecessors, Fulwood and Fleming, Day planned his book for "the unlearned. . . to whom the want hereof breedeth so divers imperfections. . . knowing how greevous it is to participate their moste secreat causes to an other, and to laye up their chiefest trust in the affiaunce of an others credite. . . ." (1586) He advises "the unlearned" not to copy the form letters slavishly.[2]

Other letter-books of the late sixteenth century show a variety of interests: Epistles of Anthony of Guevara . . . . Translated from the Spanish by E. Hellowes (1574) and Golden Epistles, contayning a varietie of discourse, both Morall, Philosophicall, and Divine: gathered, as wel out of the remaynder of Gueuarues woorkes, as other Authours, Latine, French, and Italian by Geoffrey Fenton (1576).[3] The Forest of Fancy by H. C. in 1579 is a collection of letters in verse.[4] After the turn of the century

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[1] Watson, op. cit., p. 418.

[2] Hornbeak, op. cit., p. 18.

[3] Watson, op. cit., p. 418.

[4] William G. Crane, Wit and Rhetoric in the Renaissance (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937), p. 108.

many letter manuals appeared (see Appendix). Probably the earliest guide to business correspondence in English was The Merchants Avizo, Verie Necessarie For their Sons and Servants, when they first send them beyond the Seas, as to Spaine and Portingale, or other Countries (1607). There were later editions in 1616 and 1640.[1] Nicholas Breton's A Post with a Packet of Madde Letters was perhaps the most entertaining of all the letter-writers.

> Only twice has Genius touched the complete letter-writer in English: once in Nicholas Breton's Poste with a Packet of Madde Letters and again--almost a century and half later--in Richardson's Letters Written to and for Particular Friends. . . . In fact, it is very likely that Breton's readers turned to his Poste with a Packet for recreation rather than instruction. Not a word does he waste on rhetoric, nor does he group his letters into the rigid categories of the formularies. What he offers is two books of sparkling letters, infinitely superior to the drab, lacklustre models of the usual plodding letter-writer.[2]

From 1602 to 1669 there were thirteen or fourteen editions of this work.

In the first of these books, The Enimie of Idlenesse (1568), Fulwood gives what he believes is a history of the epistle and then defines the form.

> The auncient Poet Lucanus doeth give us a verie likely conjecture that the invention of Epistles and Letters, was first found forth in the Citie of Memphis. . . . And to describe the true definition of an Epistle or letter, it is nothing else but an Oration written, conteining the minde of the Orator or wryter, thereby

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[1] Hornbeak, op. cit., p. 30.

[2] Ibid., p. 33.

> to give to understand to him or them that be absent, the same that would be declared if they were present, wherof there be three principall sortes, for some are addressed to our superiours, as to Emperours, kings, princes. Some to our equalles, as to Marchants, Burgesses, Citizens. Some to our inferiors, as to servants, laborers.[1]

The dependence of the letter form on the oration can be seen again later in the book.

> It is to bee noted that everie Epistle conteineth three partes, even as an Argument doeth, which consisteth of the Maior, the Minor, and Conclusion, which the Orators call the cause, the intent and consequence. . . .[2]

Fulwell explains the parts of a letter, the salutation, subscription, and superscripcion, which must differ according to the class of the receiver and the writer. That he was writing for the "unlearned" is obvious from the explicit directions. In the salutation to superiors one must show "humilitie and reverence, using to that person superlative and comparative termes: as most high, most mighty, right honorable, most redouted. . . according to the qualitie of their personages."[3]

> The second is the subscripcion, which must be don according to the state of the writer, and the qualitie of the person to whome he write: For to our superiors we must write at the right syde in the nether ende of the paper, saying: By your most humble and obedient sonne or servant. And to our equalles we may write towards the midst of the paper saying: By your faithfull frende forever. To our inferiors we may write on

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1 STC 11476, pp. 1-2.

2 Ibid., p. 10.

3 Ibid., p. 2

high at the left hand saying: By yours. The third is the superscripcion which must be upon the backsyde, the letter being closed, sealed and packed up after the finest fashion, whereupon must be written his name to whome the letters wold be addressed & his dwelling place, (if it be not notoriously knowne) placing therwith the name of his dignitie. . . .[1]

The second book, "conteinyng the Copies of sundry learned mens Letters and Epistles," usually those of popes and emperors, was probably far above the reach of the average man of Tudor England. The third book, "conteyning the maner and forme how to write by aunswere," is more interesting as it deals with some family problems and every-day affairs. The fourth book, "conteyning sundry Letters, belonging to Love, as well in Verse as in Prose," is quite entertaining, and one can imagine the Elizabethan apprentice striving earnestly to win his fair one with the following:

A certaine Lover writeth unto his Lady.
My Deere, if the gentle Emperour of the firmament, with al his study (as it plainly appeareth) hath vouchsafed to adorne you with heavenly and Angelicall beautie, with vertue more than humaine, with apparant modesty, and with royall customes: who then douteth but that you are pleasaunt, pitifull, gently & gracious & certes none. Because that in your faire forehead and shynyng eyes, love sheweth it selfe alwayes apparelled with Liberalitie, which things have boldened by baise alive heart, (nowe of long linked unto you with ardent sighes) to saye with mated minde, these fewe unadorned wordes, which shall be the secrete messangers of me, your assured servitour, humbly requesting you not to deny me your sweete love, wherupon continually cogitating both day and night, I am forced eftsoones to record and call upon your sweete and delectable name, from which I expect comfortable succour. No more, but that

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[1] Ibid., pp. 2-3.

> I will intende to receive from your clemencie, gentle favourable and convenient answere.[1]

Angel Day begins with a different premise in his definition of a letter in The English Secretorie (1614).

> An epistle therefore is that which usually we in our vulgar, doe tearme a Letter, and for the respects therof is called the messenger, or familiar speech of the absent, for that therein is discovered what soever the minde wisheth in such cases to have delivered. . . . And although pregnant wit ensuing by nature was the foremost cause that first bred the invention of Letters, and that every one naturally can speake, or in some sort or other set downe their meaning: yet Art prevailing in this cause, and by cunning skill marshalling every thing in his due order, place & proportion; how much more the same is then beautified, adorned, and as it were in a new shape transmuted by such kinde of knowledge, the difference that daily appeareth may yield proofe sufficient.[2]

Day believes the letter to have originated with the Romans.

> Among the ancient Romanes, when learning first grew into criticall perfection and men first devised excellently to write, then there began to be extant in memorie, diverse formes of writing immediately, by the name and title of Epistles, to be published to the posteritie.[3]

He gives what he feels are basic rules for good epistles:

> I have thought good to draw unto your consideration certaine principall points, which thereunto are specially to be required: first, Aptnes of words and sentences, respecting that they be neate and choicely picked, and orderly handled: next, brevitie of speech according in matter and deliverance, concerning the person and cause, whereupon the direction is grounded.[4]

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1 Ibid., p. 133.

2 STC 6406, pp. 1-2.

3 Ibid., p. 17.

4 Ibid., p. 5.

The parts of an epistle, according to Day, are like the oration, the Exordium, Narratio or propositio, Confirmatio, Confutatio, Peroratio.[1] As in modern books on letter writing Day discusses the order of greetings and farewells, subscriptions, superscriptions and directions with the state or position of the writer and receiver considered.[2] Day also points out explicitly how and where to write the parts of the letter, again according to rank of writer and receiver. The kinds of letters are the descriptorie, hortatory, dehortatorie, laudatorie, vituperatorie, suasorie, dissuasorie, monitorie, amatorie, petitorie, monitorie, accusatorie, excusatorie, consolatorie, invective. Each kind is explained and illustrated.[3]

> The amazing thing is to observe. . . how the divisions and patterns of oratory have been clamped down on an activity so essentially divergent. . . . Some few escaped this Procrustean bed through the omnibus classification of "familiar letters."[4]

The models, however, in The English Secretorie show considerable effort to present practical material dealing with the problems of bourgeois life. Day claims that he presents these letters in a rhetoric for the average writer.

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[1] Ibid., pp. 13-17.

[2] Ibid., pp. 17-20.

[3] Ibid., pp. 20-147.

[4] Doran, op. cit., p. 33.

A Letter Remunatorie from a Gentlewoman of good sort to a noble man her kinsman.

My good L. how much I am bound unto your L. for multitude of favours, and especially that it pleased you to think so well of me, as to write your favourable letters in my behalfe I can by no other waies expresse, then to continue your L. most humbly affectionate poore kinswoman, and will forever acknowledge it as of your great goodnesse, beyond any merit of mine owne. And as my bounden duty is, no day shall passe mee that I will not pray to God for your L. health and prosperitie, and the redoubling of your daies. Beseeching your L. to excuse this my boldnesse, and to pardon me that in person I cannot do my humble duty, but by writing, my Ladie making such haste away, as so much time will not bee permitted me. I most humbly therefore take leave of your L. From S. this 11. of November.[1]

Day included as Part III a section entitled "A Declaration of such Tropes, Figures and Schemes as either usuallie, or for Ornament sake are therein required," and as a subsection devoted some thirty pages to a discussion called "Of the parts, place and Office of a Secretorie." He introduces the material with a comment significant to the history of the democratization of letter writing (1607).

Considering how many worthy and excellent men, not onely in our present age, but in many yeeres before us have lived, none of all which (though questionless furnished with very great ability) have to my certaine knowledge, ever written out in our English tongue. . . .[2]

This section deals with the qualifications of a good secretary and puts emphasis on the need for trustworthiness. Day points out the word "secretorie" as derived from "secret," affirming that a loyal secretary for one's personal affairs

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[1] STC 6406, Part II, p. 65.

[2] STC 6405, Part III, p. 101.

is of the highest need. Day adds that a secretary must be suitably prepared in education, able to converse and to remain silent at the proper time.[1] It is not the modernity of the ideas in themselves that is of interest but the fact that letter writing had reached such importance that a text had been written for the profession of a secretary. Professor Watson in The English Grammar Schools to 1660 underlines this fact.

> The promotion of the work of the secretary into a profession is an interesting evolution from the earlier pursuit of letter-writing. It is a case of specialism in learning--taken from the classical field in the first instance--as we see in the School Exercise of Writing Latin Epistles, and gradually differentiated for practical purposes, as developed in the later edition of Angel Day's English Secretary.[2]

The English Secretorie was known well enough to appear in the Harvey-Nashe controversy. In 1593 Harvey wrote of Nashe's work,

> I have seldome read a more garish and pibald stile in any scribling Inkhornist; or tasted a more unsavory slaumpaump of wordes, and sentences in any sluttish pamfletter; that denounceth not defiance against the rules of Oratory, and the directions of the English Secretary.[3]

Inherited from classic times as a literary form capable of expressing material now reserved for the novel

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[1] Ibid., pp. 101-133.

[2] Watson, op. cit., p. 418.

[3] Ronald B. McKerrow, The Works of Thomas Nashe (London: Sidgwich & Jackson, Ltd., 1910), V, 94.

or essay, the letter in the sixteenth century was forced to develop into a tool, flexible enough to be used in the expanding economy of the period and flexible enough to carry news of the world as well as personal messages by those not of the educated class. Its flexibility, however, had to be such that the rising middle class could wield it not only in social life but in the impending complexities of trade and finance of the seventeenth century. The middle class needed more than the Latin formularies containing the letters of Cicero; they needed practical handbooks. These handbooks were written to meet a demand. As Louis B. Wright states,

> Elizabethans were fond of letter writing. Epistolary style followed Ciceronian models, but since not every Elizabethan could command the style demanded by convention, letter manuals were among the favorite handbooks.[1]

The letter, then, had become a part of the public consciousness at the time when Shakespeare was writing.

In the drama of the sixteenth century before Shakespeare's era, the epistolary form had been used. In Ralph Roister Doister a clever, entertaining scene evolves from the misreading and misinterpreting of a letter. Ralph, after great effort succeeds in getting his love letter and a ring delivered to Dame Custance, who, being unimpressed

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[1] Wright, "Handbook Learning of the Renaissance Middle Class," op. cit., p. 66.

by the attentions of the doltish Ralph, delays reading the letter. Finally, Merrygreek, the true parasite and self-styled aid to Ralph, reads the letter to her, impishly interpreting it as far from flattering to Dame Custance.

> "Sweet mistress, whereas I love you nothing at all,
> Regarding your substance and richesse chief of all,
> For your personage, beauty, demeanor, and wit,
> I commend me unto you never a whit;
> Sorry to hear report of your good welfare,
> For, as I hear say, such your conditions are,
> That ye be worthy favor of no living man;
> To be abhorred of every honest man;
> To be taken for a woman inclined to vice;
> . . . . . .
> Thus, good Mistress Custance, the Lord you save and keep
> From me, Roister Doister, whether I wake or sleep.
> Who favoreth you no less (ye may be bold)
> Than this letter purporteth, which ye have unfold."
> (III, iv, 35-70)[1]

Ralph later insists it is not his letter, but Merrygreek says, "Why, ye made it yourself, ye told me by this light." (III, iv, 76) After Dame Custance scorns poor Ralph again, he vows he will be avenged "On that vile scribbler that did my wooing disgrace." (III, iv, 130) It becomes apparent that the crafty Merrygreek had arranged with the scrivener to carry on the joke. After accusations and denials, Ralph and the scrivener agree to read the original and Ralph's copy simultaneously. The scrivener reads the original,

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[1] All quotations from plays other than Shakespeare's are from Charles R. Baskervill, Virgil B. Heltzel, and Arthur H. Nethercot, Elizabethan and Stuart Plays (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1934).

"Sweet mistress, whereas I love you--nothing at all
Regarding your richesse and substance, chief of all
For your personage, beauty, demeanor, and wit--
I commend me unto you; never a whit
Sorry to hear report of your good welfare.
For, as I hear say, such your conditions are
That ye be worth favor; of no living man
To be abhorred; of every honest man
To be taken for a woman inclined to vice
Nothing at all; to virtue giving her due price
. . . . . .
Thus, good Mistress Custance, the Lord you save and keep.
From me, Roister Doister, whether I wake or sleep,
Who favoreth you no less (ye may be bold)
Than this letter purporteth, which ye have unfold."
(III, v, 49-83)

The scene certainly provokes laughter; that the basis of the fun lies in the punctuation underscores the view that the play was a school play written for the boys at Eton.[1] The letter device, besides giving a farcical, laugh-provoking interlude, does reveal the craftiness of Merry-greek and the stupidity of Ralph.[2]

Another well-known play of the mid-sixteenth century, The Tragedy of Gorboduc, uses a letter of council to make clear to the audience what has transpired in the South of Britain at the court of Ferrex. Dordan, councilor to Ferrex appointed by King Gorboduc, writes to the king of the plot by his son Ferrex to assemble forces and attack the

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[1] Baskervill, op. cit., p. 1.

[2] The misreading of the letter recalls the misreading of the proclamation by Cain in the Towneley cycle play, "The Killing of Abel." See Joseph Quincy Adams (ed.), Chief Pre-Shakesperean Dramas (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1924), p. 99.

younger brother Porrex. Eubulus, the secretary, reads the letter to the king. The letter ends with a note of warning that King Gorboduc must act. The scene gives succinctly an analysis of the state of affairs in the South. Immediately the appointed councilor to Porrex enters and relates that Porrex is also planning to attack his brother Ferrex. The written and oral reports to the king give variety and contrast to a suspenseful scene. The written communication coming first in the scene gives a realistic weight of evidence to the impending catastrophe.

In The Spanish Tragedy of Thomas Kyd an emotion-packed scene is built from the letter device. Hieronimo, sorrowing for his murdered son, walks near the house where Bel-imperia is confined. A letter falls to the ground before the old man--a letter written in blood.

> What's here? A letter? Tush! It is not so!--
> A letter written to Hieronimo!
> "For want of ink, receive this bloody writ.
> Me hath my hapless brother hid from thee.
> Revenge thyself on Balthazar and him,
> For these were they that murdered thy son.
> Hieronimo, revenge Horatio's death,
> And better fare than Bel-imperia doth."
> (III, ii, 24-31)

Here is the first turn in the events; Hieronimo may succeed in revenge against the successful and powerful murderers, Lorenzo and Balthazar. The letter will alter the course of their achievements, and it brings the added horror of blood. Hieronimo, however, remains unsure, but his doubts are removed in Act III, scene vi, when the hangman brings him

a letter written by Pedringano before his execution telling of the murder of Horatio by Lorenzo and Balthazar. Thereafter, the revenge, so long delayed by Hieronimo's doubt and insanity, can move to a conclusion.

Christopher Marlowe uses a letter in Latin, purposely written to be misinterpreted, to bring about the death of Edward in the play Edward II. Mortimer has Edward imprisoned, guarded by the brutal jailers, Gurney and Matrevis. Mortimer fears the common people will rise in sympathy for the deposed king.

> And therefore will I do it cunningly.
> This letter, written by a friend of ours,
> Contains his death, yet bids them save his life. [Reads.]
> "Edwardum occidere nolite timere bonum est:"
> "Fear not to kill the king; 'tis good he die."
> But read it thus, and that's another sense:
> "Edwardum occidere nolite timere bonum est:"
> "Kill not the king; 'tis good to fear the worst."
> Unpointed as it is, thus shall it go,
> That, being dead, if it chance to be found,
> Matrevis and the rest may bear the blame.
> And we be quit that caused it to be done.
> (xx, 5-17)

The ingenious scheme reveals Mortimer's nature, and at the same time leaves enough doubt as to the outcome of the order for suspense.

When Lightborn arrives with the order, the jailers react as Mortimer foresaw they would.

> Gur. [Reads.] What's here? I know not how to conster it.
> Mat. Gurney, it was left unpointed for the nonce;
> "Edwardum occidere nolite timere"--
> (xxi, 16-19)

Gurney and Matrevis comply, allowing Lightborn access to

the king, and later assisting him in the murder. The letter reveals Mortimer, cruel and crafty, avoiding even a straightforward order for the murder, yet anxious to enjoy the fruits of that murder.

In Robert Greene's Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay, Lacy has romantically wooed and won the love of fair Margaret even over the love offered her by the Prince of Wales. After many difficulties, even the threat of death by Prince Edward, from which Margaret saved him, Lacy leaves to accompany his prince to Oxford. Soon Margaret receives a letter, euphuistic in phraseology, rejecting her and paying her a hundred pounds. (xii) Margaret gives the post the money and resolves to become a nun. As she is about to enter the nunnery, Lacy arrives saying of the letter, "'Twas but to try sweet Peggy's constancy." (xiv, 73) The letter seems rather cruel in the light of Lacy's character as revealed until then; it serves only to keep alive the suspense of the love story in an episodic plot.

In Arden of Feversham the letter device is relied on for much of the complication. Thomas Arden has discovered that his wife Alice and Mosbie are exchanging love letters. In London Arden and Franklin overhear Michael reading a love letter he plans to send to Susan, the maid in Arden's house. Arden is furious with Michael for so loitering when Arden's business in London is pressing; he is also furious to learn of Susan's affairs with Michael and Clarke as he heard them

discussed in the letter. The incident reveals the nature of Arden, impetuous and wrathful.

Another letter in the play, vital to the exposure of the murderers, is the one from Greene to Alice carried by Bradshaw.

> "We have missed of our purpose at London, but shall perform it by the way. We thank our neighbor Bradshaw.
> Yours,
> Richard Greene."
> (viii, 156-60)

This letter causes the innocent Bradshaw to be condemned with the conspirators. When Bradshaw asks Alice to "speak the truth" that he was not "privy" to their intent, she replies,

> What should I say? You brought me such a letter,
> But I dare swear thou knewest not the contents.
> Leave now to trouble me with worldly things,
> And let me meditate upon my Savior Christ,
> Whose blood must save me for the blood I shed.
> (xviii, 7-11)

Before an analysis of the use of the letter by Shakespeare, it may be well to note that during the period of his writing career other dramatists made use of the letter; some of these are the following: Ben Jonson in Everyman In His Humor and Sejanus; Thomas Heywood in A Woman Killed with Kindness; George Chapman in Bussy D'Ambois.

It is a truism to say that Shakespeare showed his awareness of things contemporary throughout his plays. As an alert author he knew that success before his public

depended upon his ability to capture the interest of his audience. "Though Shakespeare betrays little sympathy with the ambitions of plain citizens and doubtless wrote with an eye to courtly approval, most of his plays touch interests common to all groups."[1] He was shrewd enough to know that a dramatic production which was a means of expressing both burgeois as well as aristocratic interests was one that would fill the playhouse. It is not surprising, therefore, to discover that during this period of the increasing interest in the letter, there are in the plays of Shakespeare well over 180 references to letters. Within that broad category of references, there are better than 140 letters used in the plays, of which 92 are certainly seen on the stage while others may have been used as stage property, and 42 are completely or partially read or paraphrased. R. L. Megroz, who made a study of the prose qualities of the Shakespearean letters, comments:

> The Shakespearean letters are the most versatile and vital of all the fictive letters which appear in Elizabethan literature. They stand at the head of a literary genre which played an important part in the development of English prose; the need of composing letters was the earliest and most constant incentive to terseness, clarity and exactitude of statement. Shakespeare in his use of the written message, and in prose generally, gathers together into a sheaf all the ripest accomplishments of the age. The style of fictive letters in the novels and plays of the Tudor

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[1] Wright, Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England, p. 614.

> period is usually more finished and efficient than that of the average contemporary letter-writers. This is true, however, only when comparison is made with average actual letters of the time. The rhetoricians and dramatists, other than Shakespeare, did not produce any fictive letter equal in vitality to the best of those written by and for members of the nobility or of country families.[1]

It is the object of the chapters which comprise this dissertation to examine Shakespeare's use of the letter form as vital in the development of plot and character and as a vehicle for dramatic effectiveness. As a part of this study is an examination of the style of the letters, of the use and interchange of prose and verse rhythms in the letters, and of the commentary within the plays on letters and letter writing.

Throughout this work Shakespearean references, act, scene, and line numbers, apply to The Complete Works of Shakespeare edited by George L. Kittredge. The references to non-Shakespearean plays are taken from Elizabethan and Stuart Plays by Charles R. Baskervill, Virgil B. Heltzel, and Arthur H. Nethercot. Unless otherwise explained, references to William Fulwood's The Enimie of Idlenesse (1568) are to microfilm copy (STC 11476) from The Huntington Library and Art Gallery. Those to Angel Day's The English Secretorie, 1614 edition, are to a microfilm (STC 6406)

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[1] R. L. Megroz, Shakespeare as a Letter-Writer and Artist in Prose (London: Wishart and Co., 1927), p. 3.

from The Huntington Library and Art Gallery. Those to the 1618 edition are to a microfilm (STC 6407) from The University Library, Cambridge.

CHAPTER II

THE LETTERS: FORM AND STYLE

Although Shakespeare gave no easily memorized precepts on letter writing as he did on acting in Hamlet's instructions to the players, yet had he desired to write and publish a formulary on the subject, there is no question but that he could have taken the market from William Fulwood, Angel Day, Abraham Fleming, Nicholas Breton, and others. Within the plays Shakespeare gives a considerable number of letters which may stand as examples, far superior to those offered in the popular letter-books. But also within the plays are numerous comments on the letters which illustrate not only good style but also proper handling and format. In the many observations made by other characters and by the writers of epistles, there is much that can be seen as instructional. Of course, each letter and the tone of that message is a product of its peculiar circumstance, and the style of the missive is tempered consciously for the occasion, as is to be expected in any careful correspondence. In <u>As You Like It</u> Phebe becomes angered at Ganymede (Rosalind) and declares, "I'll write to him a very

taunting letter." (III, v, 134) When delivering it, Silvius tells Ganymede, "It bears an angry tenure." (IV, i, 11) Ganymede comments,

> Why, 'tis a boisterous and a cruel style,
> A style for challengers. Why, she defies me
> Like Turk to Christian! Women's gentle brain
> Could not drop forth such giant-rude invention,
> Such Ethiop words, blacker in their effect
> Than in their countenance. . . .
> (IV, iii, 31-36)

In Love's Labour's Lost when Dull and Costard approach King Ferdinand and Berowne with Armado's missive revealing Costard's escapades with Jaquenetta, there is much suspenseful introduction. In the discussion Berowne comments on the style, preparing Ferdinand and the audience especially for the comic parody to follow, "Well, sir, be it as the style shall give us cause to climb in the merriness." (I, i, 201-2) In Twelfth Night the written communications also cause one to "climb in the merriness." Sir Toby encourages Sir Andrew to write a challenge to Sebastian (Viola), "Go, write it in a martial hand. Be curst and brief." (III, ii, 45) When Sir Andrew hustles back, excited and proud of his challenge, he describes it, "Here's the challenge; read it. I warrant there's vinegar and pepper in't" (III, iv, 157-58) Sir Toby takes a different view, "Therefore, this letter, being so excellently ignorant, will breed no terror in the youth." (III, iv, 206-8) Sir Toby makes it clear through his comment to all

observers that Sir Andrew's mentality weighs light in the scale, in case any have misconstrued his character.

In The Merry Wives of Windsor Shakespeare has a great deal of fun with the expression "humour," in fashion at the time. He ridicules both the word and the "humour" character, particularly Dr. Caius, the French doctor.

> . . . he is the slave of a humor which is presented derisively. Every time he appears he is almost insanely excited and choleric. And his grotesque accent his fluster the more preposterous. At his very first entrance he makes clear just what his humor is. Dame Quickly, who in this play has become his housekeeper and maid-of-all-work, defines his eccentricity as 'old abusing of God's patience and the King's English.' (I. iv. 5-6)[1]

When Falstaff asks Nym and Pistol to carry his love letters to Mistress Ford and Mistress Page, they refuse. Nym replies, "I will run no base humour. Here, take the humour-letter." (I, iii, 86) Later when Nym and Pistol inform Ford and Page that Falstaff has designs on their wives, Nym does so with a play on "humour."

> Nym. [to Page.] And this is true. I like not the humour of lying. He hath wronged me in some humours. I should have borne the humour'd letter to her. But I have a sword; and it shall bite upon my necessity. He loves your wife: there's the short and the long. (II, i, 132-37)

The love letter then has become an expression of a humour, and in the jargon of Nym this one is a false or baiting letter.

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[1] Oscar James Campbell, Shakespeare's Satire (New York: Oxford University Press, 1943), pp. 77-78.

In other plays a similar view of the letter as false occurs. In The Tragedy of Troilus and Cressida when Troilus receives a letter from Cressida after he has witnessed her perfidy with Diomed, he tears the letter exclaiming, "Words, words, mere words, no matter from the heart." (V, iii, 108) In Cymbeline when Imogen awakens on her funeral bed of flowers, placed there by the sons of Belarius who thought her dead, she sees the headless body of Cloten dressed in Posthumus' clothes. Immediately she thinks the dead man is her beloved husband and believes Pisanio has brought about his death. Pisanio had drawn her away from the court with a letter from Posthumus saying he would meet her at Milford-Haven. Imogen now believes that the letter was false and that her Posthumus has been inveigled into meeting her only to be murdered, and she cries,

> . . . To write and read
> Be henceforth treacherous! Damn'd Pisanio
> Hath with his forged letters (damn'd Pisanio!)
> From this most bravest vessel of the world
> Struck the maintop! . . . .
> (IV, ii, 316-20)

Later Pisanio speaks of Posthumus' letter, calling it a "feigned" letter (V, v, 279) because it was to be used as the means of bringing Imogen away from the court so that Pisanio could murder her for her supposed faithlessness.

In The Two Gentlemen of Verona Silvia commissions Valentine to write her love letters for her, although she

intends for Valentine to discover he is writing to himself. When Valentine completes the message Silvia praises it, "I thank you gentle servant. 'Tis very clerkly done." (II, i, 114) The word "clerkly" reveals the Renaissance respect for the ability to read and write, since the interpretation of the phrase was "in a scholarly manner."[1] When Valentine misinterprets her indecision about arranging for him to write again, he asks, "What means your ladyship? Do you not like it?" She replies, "Yes, yes. The lines are very quaintly writ." (11. 127-28) In the era "quaintly" meant "elegantly" or "daintily."[2]

A different opinion concerning the work of the amanuensis is expressed in some of the plays from that implied by Silvia in her comment, "'Tis clerkly done." Perhaps the opposing view gives a basis for the considerable emphasis on the duties, responsibilities, and dignity of the secretary outlined so carefully by Angel Day in his 1607 edition of The English Secretorie under the title "Of the Parts, Place and Office of a Secretary." Day raises the office of a secretary to one of importance when he discusses the mental and moral characteristics of a good secretary. He emphasizes the loyalty, education, skill, with

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[1] C. T. Onions, A Shakespeare Glossary (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), p. 37.

[2] Ibid., p. 173.

such requirements as a knowledge of Latin, a grasp of Histories and Antiquities, and an ability to judge of the humours, behaviors, and dispositions of men.[1]

In The Tragedy of Hamlet the clerk's position is almost maligned. Hamlet tells Horatio how he succeeded in changing the orders of King Claudius so that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern would be put to death. Hamlet explains his discovery of the order, and his attitude toward the work of a clerk. It was customary for those of rank or wealth to let a secretary indite their letters.[2]

> . . . . I sat me down;
> Devis'd a new commission; wrote it fair.
> I once did hold it, as our statists do,
> A baseness to write fair, and labour'd much
> How to forget that learning; but, sir, now
> It did me yeoman's service.
> (V, ii, 31-36)

An examination of commentary on letters and writing expressed in the plays seems incomplete without the dismal view of the position of the clerk as he appears in The Second Part of Henry the Sixth. When a Weaver drags a clerk before Jack Cade, the fact that he can read and write causes his death.

> Weaver. The clerk of Chatham. He can write and read and cast accompt.
> Cade. O monstrous!
> Weaver. We took him setting of boys' copies
> Cade. Here's a villain!
> Weaver. Has a book in his pocket with red letters in't.

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[1] STC 6406, pp. 101-33.

[2] Megroz, op. cit., p. 32.

Cade. Nay, then he is a conjurer.
Butcher. Nay, he can make obligations and write court-hand.
. . . . . .
Cade. Let me alone. Dost thou use to write thy name? or hast thou a mark to thyself, like an honest plain-dealing man?
Clerk. Sir, I thank God, I have been so well brought up that I can write my name.
All. He hath confess'd! Away with him! He's a villain and a traitor!
Cade. Away with him, I say! Hang him with his pen and Inkhorn about his neck.

Within the plays much can be learned about the format and handling of epistles during the era. "I'll call for pen and ink and write my mind," says the Duke of Suffolk in The First Part of Henry the Sixth (V, III, 65) so that he can tell his prisoner Margaret of his love for her. "Good fool, some ink, paper, and light," cries Malvolio to the Clown from his dark prison in Twelfth Night (IV, II, 117). "O damn'd paper,/ Black as the ink that's on thee!" exclaims Pisanio on receiving Posthumus' letter requesting Pisanio to kill Imogen in Cymbeline (III, ii, 19-20). When asked how he contrived to duplicate the letter of King Claudius to England, Hamlet replies,

I had my father's signet in my purse,
Which was the model of that Danish seal;
Folded the writ up in the form of th' other,
Subscrib'd it, gave't th' impression, plac'd it safely,
The changeling never known.
(V, ii, 49-53)

Earlier Hamlet tells the Queen he must go to England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, "Their letters sealed." (III, iv, 202) In Cymbeline, on receiving a letter from her

beloved Posthumus, Imogen is so anxious to read it that when the hard seal slows her trembling fingers she prays, "Good wax, thy leave. Blest be/ You bees that make these locks of counsel!" (III, ii, 35-36) After Enobarbus has left him Anthony tells Eros, in The Tragedy of Anthony and Cleopatra, to send some treasure to Enobarbus and "Write to him/ (I will subscribe) gentle adieus and greetings." (IV, v, 13-14) In The Life of Timon of Athens the page asks, "Prithee, Apemantus, read me the superscription of these letters. I know not which is which." (II, ii, 82-84) In The Third Part of Henry the Sixth when Warwick is in France at the court of King Lewis to arrange the marriage of Edward IV and the sister of the French Queen, news arrives from England of Edward's marriage to Lady Grey. The Post arrives first blowing a horn and then appearing on stage to distribute the mail.

The details in relation to the handling of letters in the plays shows an effort for a realistic effect which enhanced the feeling of intimacy between the audience and the stage when the spectator saw and heard familiar procedures. R. L. Megroz describes the format and handling of letters during the period.

> Letters were written in ink, which was dried by scattering sand over the writing. They were written on large sheets of paper, from 12 to 20 inches long by 10 to 15 inches wide when uncut. . . . When a letter was written care was taken to close it securely. The paper was folded into an oblong packet, rather like a modern envelope, 3 or 4 inches long by 2 or 3 inches wide; a

> thread or strip of paper was passed through the packet, and the two ends of the thread were sealed together with the address.[1]

In the popular letter-books considerable emphasis is placed on the parts of the letter. In his preface to the 1578 edition of The Enimie of Idlenesse, William Fulwood emphasizes that he is writing the book for the "unskilfull scholer that wanteth instructions."[2] He then proceeds to enumerate the parts of a letter and to discuss the tone of expression:

> The first is the salutacion or recommendacion, which is made in sundrie maners. . . . The second is the Subscription, which must be don according to the estate of the writer, and the qualitie of the person to whome we write. . . . The third is the Superscripcion. . . .[3]

Angel Day in The English Secretorie also deals thoroughly with "the maner of salutation," the "order of taking leave or farwell [sic] the subscription, and the outwarde direction." These matters are carefully adjusted to the relative rank and station of the writer and recipient.[4] Shakespeare is making use of this matter which is popular knowledge when he gives a letter in full. In The First Part of King Henry the Sixth, Fastolfe brings a letter of rebellion from the

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[1] Megroz, op. cit., pp. 31-32.

[2] Wright, Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England, p. 139.

[3] STC 11476, p. 4.

[4] STC 6406, p. 12ff.

Duke of Burgundy to King Henry; the Duke of Gloucester reads it commenting on the superscription and style.

> Gloucester. What means his Grace that he hath chang'd his style?
> No more but plain and bluntly 'To the King'?
> Hath he forgot he is his sovereign?
> Or doth this churlish superscription
> Pretend some alteration in good will?
> (IV, i, 49-54)

William Fulwood points out that of the epistle or letter "there be three principall sortes."

> For some are addressed to our superiours, as to Emperours, kings, princes. Some to our equalles, as to Marchants, Burgesses, Citizens. Some to our inferiours, as to servants, laborers.[1]

In addressing superiors he insists that the enditer must show "humilitie and reverence, using to that person superlative and comparative termes: as most high, most mighty, right honourable, most redoubted most loyall. . . according to the qualitie of their personages."[2]

Angel Day devotes a chapter to "divers orders of greeting farewels and subscriptions" using most turgid phraseology. As proper subscriptions he suggests,

> Acknowledging my selfe deeply bound unto your L. for many sundrie favours:
> He that hath avowed to live and die in your honourable service,
> Whose regard stretcheth unto your worship more then unto others,
> More choice of your welfare, then carefull of himselfe.[3]

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[1] STC 11476, p. 2.

[2] Ibid.

[3] STC 6406, pp. 13-16.

Shakespeare was following the laws of letter writing, perhaps even the "comeliness of deliverance" or "decorum" as Angel Day called it.[1] Shakespeare knew his audience; he knew they were conscious of the proper forms of address.

> It was an audience, too, far more ready than we are to think of speech as an art, to accept conventions, and quick to note and appreciate distinctions and changes of key, for all family and social life was more strictly governed by these then than now. There was more differences between the modes of address reserved for one's superiors and one's inferiors, between the tones and phrases used to the old and the young.[2]

Armado's missive to King Ferdinand begins,

> Great deputy, the welkin's vicegerent, and sole dominator of Navarre, my soul's earth's god and body's fost'ring patron. . . .
>
> (I, i, 221-23)

His subscription reads,

> Thine, in all complements of devoted and heart-burning heat of duty,
>
> DON ADRIANO DE ARMADO.
> (I, i, 279-80)

Armado's love note to Jaquenetta and Falstaff's letter to Prince Hal likewise give careful attention to the parts of the epistle form. In Love's Labour's Lost the care with which each part of the letter is phrased reflects the overly intense interest of Armado in the niceties of correct behavior. Falstaff's detailed emphasis on the address and

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[1] Ibid., pp. 17-20.

[2] Harley Granville-Barker and G. B. Harrison, A Companion to Shakespeare Studies (New York: Macmillan Co., 1934), p. 133.

farewell are additional means of characterizing him. However, in most of the written communications, Shakespeare moves rapidly to the heart of the message without spending time on greetings or farewells as is dramatically expedient.

The letters read on the stage in whole or in part may be classified according to content as letters of information, the broadest category, including those of intrigue, recommendation, and challenge. Examples in this group are the letters of Hamlet to Horatio and Claudius, Macbeth's to his wife, Goneril's to Regan, Armado's to the King, the challenge of Sir Toby to Viola, the recommendation of Portia as Balthasar, Malvolio's appeal to Olivia for release from his dark prison. Another group includes the letters carrying orders as Angelo's in Measure for Measure, Posthumus' directions to Pisanio in Cymbeline. These two, however, could be classified as treacherous letters along with Aaron's message to the King in The Tragedy of Titus Andronicus, Edmund's forged letter in The Tragedy of King Lear, Parolles' note to Dian concerning Bertram in All's Well That Ends Well, and Goneril's offer to Edmund. Within this class may also appear the baiting letter of Maria in Twelfth Night. A fourth and large group is the love letters in The Two Gentlemen of Verona, As You Like It, Love's Labour's Lost, and The Tragedy of Hamlet. Certainly a far wider classification would be needed if all the letters referred to were used, even if only those which were seen

but not read were included. R. L. Megroz in his study of the Shakespearean letters as prose material classified the letters as fanatical fantasimes, tangled love, urgent business, and treachery.[1]

The use of prose or verse or both in the missive offers room for inquiry. Prose is used for all except love letters although there are exceptions. Verse and prose appear in Hamlet's letter to Ophelia, Maria's forged letter to Malvolio, and Armado's note to Jaquenetta. The treacherous love letter of Posthumus to Imogen is entirely in prose. Verse is used in the message from Helena to the Countess, and in the deceitful letter found on Parolles in All's Well That Ends Well, and in Aaron's fraudulent message in The Tragedy of Titus Adronicus. R. L. Megroz has pointed out that it seems to be a rule that all letters, not including love letters, proclamations and other written documents are in prose except the letter in The Tragedy of Titus Adronicus and three out of five letters in All's Well That Ends Well.[2] Marie Muncaster in a study of prose in Elizabethan drama concludes that the conventional uses of prose in Elizabethan and later drama are in broadly comic passages, in formal documents and proclamations, in letters, except when they are lyric in tone, and in passages where great emotion shows

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[1] Megroz, op. cit., p. 38ff.

[2] Ibid., p. 31.

derangement.[1]

The interchange of prose and verse within the message and within the scene underscores a dramatic tension in both comic and tragic scenes. In the forty-two letters read on the stage or in the context before and after the letters, there is a shift either from prose to verse or verse to prose or a shift in prose rhythms or verse rhythms in all but four. Aaron's letter in The Tragedy of Titus Andronicus is in blank verse as is the rest of the scene, and Angelo's order in Measure for Measure is in prose as is most of the scene. Edmund's forged letter in The Tragedy of King Lear carries the same rhythm as do his speeches before and after the written word--a clever thrust by a shrewd author in pointing up the real author by the prose style. Falstaff's note to Prince Hal in The Second Part of King Henry the Fourth succeeds in disassociating itself from the prose scene only by its wit.

Usually, however, shifts in rhythm occur when the written message and scene are of the same medium. In Love's Labour's Lost Armado's letter to the King introduces a new prose rhythm. The sonnets of Longaville and Dumain appearing within verse scenes break with the rhythm. Especially does Dumain's break the pattern of speech:

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[1] Marie Muncaster, "The Use of Prose in Elizabethan Drama," Modern Language Review, XIV (1919), 13.

Dumain. Once more I'll read the ode that I have writ.
Berowne. [aside] Once more I'll mark how love can vary wit.

[Dumain reads his sonnet]

'On a day-alack the day!--
Love, whose month is ever May,
Spied a blossom passing fair
Playing in the wanton air. . . .'
(IV, iii, 98-104)

In The Two Gentlemen of Verona the ten line poem is forced to stand apart from the other lines of the scene by its smooth, regular rhythm and by its feminine endings.

Duke. How shall I fashion me to wear a cloak?
I pray thee let me feel thy cloak upon me.
[Takes the cloak]
What letter is this same? What's here? 'To Silvia'?
And here an engine fit for my proceeding!
I'll be so bold to break the seal for once. [Reads]
'My thoughts do harbour with my Silvia nightly,
And slaves they are to me, that send them flying.
O, could their master come and go as lightly,
Himself would lodge where (senseless) they are lying!
(III, i, 135-43)

Epistles in verse which in most instances make an obvious shift from prose or from the rhythm of blank verse acquire added emphasis necessary for the content of the message or for entertainment. As an example, Helena's sonnet sent to the Countess in Act III, scene iv, of All's Well That Ends Well recounts vital information concerning Helena's departure but also heightens the emotional appeal by the sonnet form because of the unity and concentration of the poem. In like manner, the prose letter in a blank verse scene offers dramatic contrast, as for instance the letters of Hamlet.

> Two letters from Hamlet are read aloud in the last two scenes of Act IV. The first letter, to Horatio, is prefaced by the Sailor's few lines of prose; it is short and to the point, informative and friendly. The second, to the King, announces Hamlet's return and his desire to see the King; but its two sentences recreate suddenly the contemptuous and deliberately mystifying manner of Hamlet in the presence of his enemies. This gage thrown to the King illustrates admirably how the prose letter can be made to intrude into a scene.[1]

While Shakespeare was following a convention in his use of prose in twenty-three letters with two others in verse and prose, he did so with a recognition of the realistic appeal. Certainly the introduction of a prose letter in a verse play is an intrusion from a real world and the intrusion is heightened by the marked difference in expression.[2]

> A review of the use of prose in the plays discussed would reveal Shakespeare beginning with a mixed heritage: Euphuistic dramatic prose from Lyly, the public domain of clown-prose, and various conventional usages. To this accumulation, he gradually adds original changes and innovations. . . he regularly uses prose to set off his verse and to offer striking contrast to it both in terms of character and of dramatic action. Prose, the form of common speech, introduces an atmosphere of realism; and prose speakers in Shakespeare constantly recall the existence of a world which, although not the "real world" of the audience, is nevertheless somehow physically nearer than the poetic world. His greatest effects of dramatic illusion are obtained by the sense he communicates of the coexistence and interaction of these two worlds.[3]

The letter form, holding a place in the public consciousness

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[1] Milton Crane, Shakespeare's Prose (Chicago: University Press, 1951), p. 152.

[2] Ibid., p. 3.

[3] Ibid., p. 100.

at that time was, therefore, an added means of attaining that sense of coexistence of the world of the stage and the real world. Such realism occurs in the letters in The Merchant of Venice. The matter-of-fact prose in the letter Portia presents to introduce herself to the court as a young lawyer hides the almost incredible disguise of Portia behind the factualness of the written communication.

In As You Like It the three love messages in verse appear in prose scenes to give the love theme a lyric tone. That love letters were in verse was not unrealistic for the Elizabethan who was so close to the great sonnet era. Also, many of the letter-books carried models of love epistles in verse. Even in the first of these in 1568, Fulwood devotes "a fourth boke containyng sundry Letters, belonging to Love, as well in Verse as in Prose."[1]

The epistles of Shakespeare appear in prose or verse medium to express the immediate dramatic mood. The shift in style gives variety to a scene; the prose always carries the additional sense of realism. Either form may assist in character portrayal according to the needs of the occasion. The verse form, especially the couplet, may offer clues for change of mood, entrance of characters, or shift of medium.[2]

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[1] STC 11476, p. 113.

[2] Karl J. Holzknecht, The Backgrounds of Shakespeare's Plays (New York: American Book Co., 1950), p. 261.

From the first of the letter-books, William Fulwood's *The Enimie of Idlenesse*, the aim was a handbook to "edifie the ignorant." The tradition of Ciceronianism, however, was so strong that expression in model letters tended to be far beyond the ability of the "ignorant." As the handbooks increased in popularity and increased in number and editions, the aim for the work-a-day style was somewhat accomplished. On the title-page of *The English Secretorie* (1586) Angel Day said he "layd forth a Path-waye, so apt, plaine and easie, to any learners capacity."[1] He then listed three qualities "to be respected in framing of an Epistle: Aptness of wordes and sentences, Brevity of Speach, and Comelinesse in deliverance touching the person and cause."[2] In 1602 Nicholas Breton's *A Poste with a Madde Packet of Letters* was certainly bourgeois in tone and developed into familiar essays on thrift, industry, and sobriety.[3] Gervase Markham's *Hobson's Horse-load of Letters* strove for a happy medium between affected ornamentation and dull matter-of-factness. In many model letters he gives not only those from one King to another but many of plain speech for merchants, apprentices, and schoolboys.[4] He seems to make an effort to justify the

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[1] Wright, *Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England*, p. 140.

[2] STC 6406, pp. 2-5.

[3] Wright, *Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England*, p. 141.

[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 141-42.

simple style and reconcile it with the rhetoric of Ciceronianism.

The letters in the Shakespeare plays seem to follow the ideals of the handbooks far better even than do the model letters. Shakespeare shows the aptness, brevity, comeliness so highly praised in the letter-writers. Of course, more than one reason can be offered. Shakespeare was a master in the craft of writing, a poet, one whose pen had considerable flexibility from use, although the authors of the letter-books cannot be said to be inexperienced. But quite frequently they used many letters translated from formularies popular on the continent.[1] Primarily, however, Shakespeare's letters were forced by the demands of the theater to have clarity, conciseness, and directness in presenting the message in order to reach the spectator and leave him with a clear understanding of the situation. Also, these same demands insisted on "comeliness of deliverance" or ornamentation which would be pleasing in sound and sense, choice of word, and figure of speech that were a part of the entertainment of the dramatic production. It cannot be claimed that the letters in the plays were so far-reaching in effect that the style of letter writing improved in clarity, directness, and expression because of them. It can be said that they appeared at a time when such matters of the epistolary style were of

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[1] Hornbeak, op. cit., p. 13.

considerable interest and when a prose style was evolving that would allow for handling by plain folk. As examples of letters from the plays that show the directness and conciseness of a useable style there are the letters of Hamlet and Macbeth, the order of Angelo, the forged letter of Edmund as well as the message of the groom to the Lord Chamberlain telling of Cardinal Wolsey's highhandedness in claiming the horses. That Shakespeare was aware of the controversy in rhetoric can be seen in Love's Labour's Lost when Holofernes comments on Sir Nathaniel.

> Holofernes. He draweth out the thread of his verbosity finer than the staple of his argument. I abhor such fanatical phantasims, such insociable and point-devise companions. . . .
>
> (V, i, 18-22)

Then Moth describes Holofernes and Sir Nathaniel. "They have been at a great feast of languages and stol'n the scraps." (V, i, 39-40)

The problems of a workable style for letter writing certainly were of vital interest to the period when the demands of an expanding economy, a developing industrialization, and a widening horizon were to be appeased. That some of these problems were being faced in the literary market is evidenced in the popularity of the handbooks, the considerable use of the letter in literature, and some of the letters of the period. There is a change in style from a highly ornate, indirect, verbose expression in the Sir John

Hamilton letters written from 1571 to his death in 1612 to the direct, flexible, informal clarity of the letters of James Howell written during the period 1616-1666. Even with a recognition that each man had his own peculiarity of expression, it is obvious that the epistle had become a tool which others than Ciceronian scholars could grasp.

Of Love's Labour's Lost it has been said, "In much of the play Shakespeare is a commentator on language and literary theory with verbal comedy as his instrument."[1] The play is satiric of affectations of speech, of dullness, of pedantry, of Latinity, of the sterility of the unnatural life of learning carried to the exclusion of nature. The magnificent Armado becomes the prime example, the Monarcho of those so afflicted. He is the "plume of feathers," the "vane," the "weathercock," a "phantasim." (IV, i, 95-100) He admits he is in love against his better judgment.

> Armado. I will hereupon confess I am in love; and as it is base for a soldier to love, so am I in love with a base wench. If drawing my sword against the humour of affection would deliver me from the reprobate thought of it, I would take Desire prisoner and ransom him to any French courtier for a new-devis'd cursy. I think scorn to sigh; methinks I should outswear Cupid. (I, ii, 60-67)

Holofernes, who is also a satiric figure of dull learning, says of Armado,

> His humour is lofty, his discourse peremptory, his

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[1] B. Ifor Evans, The Language of Shakespeare's Plays (London: Methuen & Co., 1952), p. 14.

> tongue filed, his eye ambitious, his gait majestical, and his general behavior vain, ridiculous, and thrasonical. He is too picked, too spruce, too affected, too odd, as it were, to peregrinate, as I may call it.
> . . . . . .
> He draweth out the thread of his verbosity finer than the staple of his argument.
>
> (V, i, 10-19)

Armado's letters become satiric of himself and all he stands for. Shakespeare strikes out against the excessive inkhornisms which Puttenham inveighed against in The Arte of English Poesie, the verbosity and affectation of Euphuism, as well as a defect in humanistic endeavor if it becomes pedantry.[1] Was Shakespeare also poking fun at the letter-books that recommended such high-flown greetings, and subscriptions, such phraseology as Armado uses? King Ferdinand reads the letter,

> 'Great deputy, the welkin's vicegerent, and sole dominator of Navarre, my soul's earth's god and body's fost'ring patron"--
> . . . . . .
> So it is, besieged with sable-coloured melancholy, I did commend the black oppressing humour to the most wholesome physic of thy health-giving air; and, as I am a gentleman, betook myself to walk. The time When? About the sixth hour, when beasts most graze, birds best peck, and men sit down to that nourishment which is called supper. So much for the time When. Now for the ground Which? which, I mean, I walk'd upon. It is ycliped thy park. Then for the place Where? where, I mean, I did encounter that obscene and most prepost'rous event that draweth from my snow-white pen the ebon-coloured ink. . . .
>
> (I, i, 221-47)

It has been pointed out that in this letter Shakespeare

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[1] Campbell, op. cit., pp. 38-43.

uses one of Thomas Wilson's examples as a model,[1] yet Angel Day emphasizes the importance of giving the when, which, who in his directions on letter writing.[2] That Shakespeare had knowledge of the accepted phrases set forth in the formularies of the period seems likely from his comic use of them. In Shakespeare's Use of Learning, Virgil Whitaker says that Shakespeare learned to write letters very probably from Erasmus' De Conscribendis Epistolis.[3]

> With Chapter XII the work becomes a manual, giving instructions for conventional sentences of salutation, for what in modern jargon is called the complimentary close, and for indicating the place and date. It provides lists of formulae suitable for different kinds of people, from which Shakespeare drew matter for fun. (cf. Taming of the Shrew, IV, v, 27-40)[4]

In the misdirected love letter of Armado appear more of the extravagances of Euphuism with its balance and alliteration. Again he uses the triple series of phrases, a satire on the rhetorical principle of triplicity.[5] Boyet reads the message.

> 'By heaven, that thou art fair is most infallible; true that thou art beauteous; truth itself that thou art lovely. More fairer than fair, beautiful than beauteous, truer than truth itself, have commiseration on thy

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1 George A. Plimpton, The Education of Shakespeare (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 119.

2 STC 6406, pp. 8-12.

3 Virgil K. Whitaker, Shakespeare's Use of Learning (San Marino: The Huntington Library, 1953), p. 32.

4 Ibid., p. 33.

5 Evans, op. cit., p. 5.

> heroical vassal! . . . . . He came, one; saw, two, overcame, three. Who came? The king. Why did he come? To see. Why did he see? To overcome. To whom came? To the beggar. Who overcame? The beggar. The conclusion is victory. On whose side? The king's. The captive is enrich'd. On whose side? The beggar's. The catastrophe is a nuptial. . . . Thus, expecting thy reply, I profane my lips on thy foot, my eyes on thy picture, and my heart on thy every part.'
>
> (IV, i, 60-88)

At last he closes with a most grandiloquent farewell.

> 'Thine, in the dearest design of industry.
> DON ADRIANO DE ARMADO.'

The rhymed letter to Rosalind in As You Like It is another example of ridicule appearing within the epistle form. It is a parody of love missives especially those of pastoral drama and romance.[1]

> From the east to western Inde,
> No jewel is like Rosalind.
> Her worth, being mounted on the wind,
> Through all the world bears Rosalinde. . . .
> (III, ii, 93-97)

Even Touchstone, in his capacity of the clown in pastoral drama who mimics his betters, then makes a parody of the parody.

> If a hart do lack a hind,
> Let him seek out Rosalinde,
> If the cat will after kind,
> So be sure will Rosalinde. . . .
> (III, ii, 106-10)

However, the rhymed love message to Rosalind and the parody by Touchstone aid in giving a light-hearted aura to what

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[1] William G. Meader, Courtship in Shakespeare (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954), p. 150.

could be a difficult situation with Rosalind and Celia homeless wanderers, Duke Senior in banishment, and Orlando a runaway. The verse is a part of the web of protective yet acceptable unreality of the entire fantasy, a pastoral escape, a romance. The letters may be posted on trees in the Forest of Arden, yet they are love letters and they do point up a parody which calls in enough realism to give ballast to the scene. Even Rosalind remarks of the poems from Orlando,

> O yes, I heard them all, and more too; for some of them had in them more feet than the verses would bear. (III, ii, 173-75)

The form and style of the letter was in the public consciousness, and Shakespeare capitalized on what could be termed a topical interest. That comments were given on the placing and style of the superscription or on the sealing or unsealing gives evidence that such matter had to be of vital interest to the spectators. As a test, would a modern audience to whom the format of letters is commonplace be concerned with such matters? Only as they affect the plot or offer realistic detail. Shakespeare too was aware of the dramatic intensity he could engender by a haunting echo to the world of reality within a stage world of far away or long ago.

The fact that in thirty-eight of the forty-two letters read on the stage there was some obvious manipulating

of rhythms either in verse or prose, some contrast made evident, stands as evidence that Shakespeare saw some theatric value in the letter form. More than any other playwright, he successfully combined the media of prose and verse.[1] The frequent comments on the style of the letter either before or after they are read reveal a recognition by Shakespeare of the flexible language of his time, the incipient English rhetoric, and the emerging style that was in less than a century under Dryden to be forged to a workable tool for all.

> The most impressive qualities of the vernacular in Shakespeare's service are freshness and flexibility. His English was a living speech that was only beginning to submit to the framing influences of printing. In Shakespeare's day, there were no grammars, dictionaries, or accepted conventions of diction, as in Latin, and very few literary models. Spelling and pronunciation were chaotic, meanings were yet plastic, and the language was feeling its way to a standard syntax. It was still growing, delighting in novelties, being particularly hospitable to foreign words, and freely forming new compounds.[2]

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1 Crane, Shakespeare's Prose, p. 2.

2 Holzknecht, op. cit., p. 186.

CHAPTER III

THE LETTER DEVICE AND PLOT

That the Elizabethan audience was pre-eminently interested in story is axiomatic.

> The fact is, the mood of the Elizabethan theatre-goer was delightfully childlike. He came as a child comes saying practically, 'Tell me a story,' and he cared not at all, provided the story was interestingly told, if he had heard another tell it before.[1]

The Elizabethan so loved the story itself that he could enjoy the retelling of it within the same play as in the recapitulation at the end of The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet.[2] Likewise, near the end of The Tragedy of King Lear, Edgar relates to Albany what the audience already knows.[3] It was for this interest in the intricacies of a well-told tale that the Elizabethan master dramatist packed his plays with devious and intricate plots, subplots,

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[1] George Pierce Baker, The Development of Shakespeare (New York: Macmillan Co., 1907), p. 13.

[2] All quotations from Shakespeare's plays are from the edition of George L. Kittredge, The Complete Works of Shakespeare (New York: Ginn and Co., 1936), pp. 229-95.

[3] V, iii, 181-221.

counterplots, and double plots. With such complicated material in his hands, he saw the necessity for compression and selectivity in order to bring a pattern out of chaos. The plot, subplot, or episode needed introduction; suspense had to be engendered in controlled amounts and at the proper time; chronology had to be made clear to the audience. At the same time, he wished to hold the interest of the audience with dramatic activity on the stage through ear and eye appeal. Accordingly, as one means for handling complexities effectively he turned repeatedly to the device of the letter.

Conscious as he was of the growing importance of letter writing in personal, social, and business communication, Shakespeare saw in it excellent dramatic possibilities. With it he could satisfy the desire for amusement and information. The Elizabethan playgoer was amused by the plot, so often furthered or explained by the letter, and intrigued by the letter itself, an echo of the then popular letter-book, which perhaps he was using to improve his own correspondence. It was a device ready to be incorporated in the drama, and Shakespeare, always with his hand sensitive to the pulse of the spectator, frequently presented expositional matter in the letter form. "Unless he begins ab ovo, a playwright usually has a great deal to explain to his hearers before he can unfold his story."[1]

[1] Holzknecht, op. cit., p. 258.

"I learn in this letter that Don Pedro of Arragon comes this night to Messina," says Leonato in the first line of Much Ado About Nothing. He speaks with the messenger from Don Pedro:

> Leon. How many gentlemen have you lost in this action?
> Mess. But few of any sort, and none of name.
> Leon. A victory is twice itself when the achiever brings home full numbers. I find here that Don Pedro hath bestowed much honour on a young Florentine called Claudio.
> Mess. Much deserv'd on his part, and equally rememb'red by Don Pedro. He hath borne himself beyond the promise of his age. . . .
> Leon. He hath an uncle here in Messina will be very much glad of it.
> Mess. I have already delivered him letters, and there appears much joy in him. . . .
> (I, i, 5-21)

Here is the stock character, the nuntius, bringing information from off stage, being reinforced by the letter. Why does Shakespeare use both the messenger and the letter? There is a certain immediacy of effect obtained by the letter in the hands of Leonato. Don Pedro's own handwriting gives testimony to his approach. To a quiet scene comes the activity of the letter being unsealed and read.

Beatrice enters and inquires about Signior Montanto while Hero informs Leonato and the audience that Beatrice means Signior Benedict. Through the letter and the messenger, Shakespeare has completed much of the exposition of the play. He has set up character relations, the impending visit of Don Pedro, the Beatrice and Benedict attraction, the character of Claudio. The letter and the messenger

have made compact the precedent conditions for the play.

The exposition in the first scene of The First Part of Henry the Sixth also makes use of the letter. A messenger enters.

> Mess. Lords, view these letters, full of
> bad mischance.
> France is revolted from the English quite,
> Except some petty towns of no import.
> The Dauphin Charles is crowned king in Rheims;
> The Bastard of Orleans with him is join'd;
> Reignier, Duke of Anjou, doth take his part;
> The Duke of Alençon flieth to his side.
> (I, i, 89-96)

After one reference to "these letters," the messenger gives the information and the letters are ignored. Later in this scene three messengers enter, each with more distressing news. The Dukes of Bedford, Gloucester, and Exeter ask questions and make decisions on future action. The activity of letter reading is not necessary. The messenger would have sufficed in presenting information, but Shakespeare knew his theater. The letter has the strength of written authority, but, primarily, the visual evidence gave the audience their money's worth. The audience wanted to see as well as hear. They saw the letter; the messenger was merely the oral confirmation of the direct visual appeal in the letter. The expository material is not only heard but seen.

> But frequently as the play progresses, various things have to be explained: characters have to be identified, events recapitulated, action prepared for, or details of time and place clarified. Such

> information Shakespeare managed to convey by various means--soliloquies, asides, chorus characters who comment upon the action or give direct testimony on their fellows, or simple and casual conversation.[1]

To these techniques the epistle may be added.

In The First Part of Henry the Fourth a letter occupies nearly half of scene iii, Act II. The act is devoted to the escapades of Prince Hal and Falstaff and their Boar's Head friends. Scene i occurs in an innyard at Rochester; scene ii is the famous attempted robbery on the highway when the disguised Prince routs Falstaff. In scene iv at the Boar's Head Tavern Falstaff tells the fabulous tale of his courage in the robbery, only to be exposed in hilarious comedy by the Prince. Meanwhile, scene iii reveals Hotspur at Warkworth Castle reading a letter from a friend who now declines to enter the planned rebellion.

> Hot. 'But, for mine own part, my Lord, I could be well contented to be there, in respect of the love I bear your house.' He could be contented--why is he not then? In respect of the love he bears our house! He shows in this he loves his own barn better than he loves our house. Let me see some more. 'The purpose you undertake is dangerous'--Why, that's certain! 'Tis dangerous to take cold, to sleep, to drink; but I tell you, my lord fool, out of this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, safety. 'The purpose you undertake is dangerous, the friends you have named uncertain, the time itself unsorted, and your whole plot too light for the counterpoise of so great an opposition.' Say you so, say you so? I say unto you again you are a shallow, cowardly hind, and you lie. . . . Why, my Lord of York commends the plot and the general course of the action. Zounds, an I were now by this rascal, I could brain him with

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[1] Ibid., p. 259.

> his lady's fan. Is there not my father, my uncle, and myself; Lord Edmund Mortimer, my Lord of York, and Owen Glendower? Is there not, besides, the Douglas? Have I not all their letters to meet me in arms by the ninth of the next month, and are they not some of them set forward already?
>
> (II, iii, 1-30)

As he reads the letter, Hotspur comments on each line. From the letter and the comments the audience learns of the progress of the uprising in the North and of the determination of the impetuous Hotspur to foment rebellion. When he rages at the timidity of his former conspirator, he renames his colleagues so that the audience keeps in mind the main plot. The scene, comprised largely of the letter device, raises the suspense of the central issues as a darkening cloud while projecting in relief the courage of Hotspur against the riotous fun-making of the madcap Prince.

The letter from Falstaff to the Prince in The Second Part of Henry the Fourth, read by Poins to the Prince, precipitates the last carefree adventure of Falstaff and the Prince.

> Poins. [reads] 'I will imitate the Romans in brevity.' He sure means brevity in breath--short-winded. 'I commend me to thee, I commend thee, and I leave thee. Be not too familiar with Poins, for he misuses thy favours so much that he swears thou art to marry his sister Nell. Repent at idle times as thou mayst; and so farewell.
>
> 'Thine, by yea and no (which is as much as to say, as thou usest him), Jack Falstaff with my familiars, John with my brothers and sisters, and Sir John with all Europe.'
>
> My lord, I'll steep this letter in sack and make

him eat it.

(II, ii, 133-47)

Because of this news the Prince and Poins attempt to discomfit the wily Falstaff, but the jesting between Falstaff and the Prince ends forever when army duties call them. The letter, however, was the means to introduce the long comic scene at the Boar's Head.

Complicating action evolves in Act I of Cymbeline when Iachimo arrives in England with the letter of introduction from Posthumus. So important is this missive to the rising action of the play that Imogen reads it on stage.[1] Because she is convinced by the handwriting that Iachimo is her husband's friend, she admits him to her trust. With this entrée Iachimo is able to succeed in his dastardly resolve to make Posthumus believe his wife is faithless.

In Act III Pisanio receives the fatal letter from his master telling him to murder Imogen. Pisanio reads in a distracted fashion, commenting on the contents:

> How? of adultery? Wherefore write you not
> What monster's her accuser? Leonatus!
> O master! what a strange infection
> Is fall'n into thy ear! What false Italian,
> As poisonous-tongu'd as handed, hath prevail'd
> On thy too ready hearing? Disloyal? No!
> . . . . . .
> . . . that I should murther her,
> Upon the love and truth and vows which I
> Have made to thy command? I her? Her blood?
> If it be so to do good service, never
> Let me be counted serviceable. How look I

[1] I, vi, 21-26.

That I should seem to lack humanity
So much as this fact comes to? [Reads] 'Do 't!
The letter
That I have sent her, by her own command
Shall give thee opportunity.' O damn'd paper,
Black as the ink that's on thee!
(III, ii, 1-20)

Interest in the detail of the letter as stage material is evidenced in Pisanio's curse, "Black as the Ink." Dramatically he rages over the letter, waving it before the spellbound audience. Here in Leonatus own hand is the command to murder the beloved Imogen, tangible proof of Leonatus' confused thinking. The spectators see and hear the message, while powerless to save Imogen.

In dramatic contrast Imogen opens her letter from Leonatus while calling on the gods to learn of his love, his health, his content. For stage activity and dramatic suspense Imogen's shaking hands have trouble with the seal of the letter. When Imogen calls on the wax to yield, the audience is captivated by the realistic detail and feels a kinaesthetic response. "Good wax, thy leave. Blest be/ You bees that make these locks of counsel!" (III, ii, 34-35) Still talking to the letter, she creates a suspenseful delay while naming some of the many uses of the bond or seal.

Lovers
And men in dangerous bonds pray not alike.
Though forfeiters you cast in prison, yet
You clasp young Cupid's tables. Good news, gods!
(III, ii, 36-40)

Finally she opens the letter and reads it.

Justice and your father's wrath, should he take me in

his dominion, could not be so cruel to me as you, O dearest of creatures, would even renew me with your eyes. Take notice that I am in Canabria at Milford Haven. What your own love will out of this advise you, follow. So he wishes you all happiness that remains loyal to his vow and your increasing in love.

Leonatus Posthumus.

O, for a horse with wings! Hear'st thou Pisanio? He is at Milford Haven.

(III, ii, 40-51)

The action for the remainder of the play results from the directions given in these two letters. Imogen leaves with Pisanio to be lost and found by the King's own sons, and Pisanio uses his letter to outwit the villainous Cloten.

In some of the plays a major portion of the action is precipitated by letters. In Act I, scene i, of The Two Gentlemen of Verona Valentine leaves Proteus saying,

. . . now let us take our leave,
To Milan let me hear from thee by letters
Of thy success in love, and what news else
Betideth here in absence of thy friend;
And I likewise will visit thee with mine.

(I, i, 56-59)

The remainder of the scene is devoted to comic dialogue between Proteus and Speed about Julia's reactions on receiving Proteus' letter. In scene ii Julia receives the letter, refuses it, talks about it with her maid, tears it, weeps over the pieces, kisses them. The two scenes, using the letter as framework, reveal some of the conditions at the beginning of the play: Valentine's departure, Proteus' love for Julia, Julia's love for Proteus, the importance of the servant Speed and the maid Lucetta. In scene ii after

Panthino has convinced Antonio that his son Proteus should go to the Emperor's court in Milan, Antonio meets Proteus reading a letter.

> Sweet love, sweet lines, sweet life!
> Here is her hand, the agent of her heart;
> Here is her oath for love, her honour's pawn.
> (I, ii, 45-48)

sighs Proteus over the letter, but when his father asks what he is reading, Proteus claims it is from Valentine, who is at the Emperor's court. He then assures his father he is happy to remain in Verona. Antonio responds with the command that Proteus is to leave on the morrow for Milan. As Proteus so well states it, he has "shunned the fire for fear of burning" and been "drenched in the sea." He failed to admit to his father that it was a love letter from Julia and to ask for permission to marry her. His lie about the letter and his feigned interest in Valentine at Milan has prevented him from interceding in his own interests.

In Milan Valentine has fallen in love with Silvia. Although he has not presumed to tell her of his love, she makes clear her interest in him by commissioning him to write love letters for her to a "friend." When Valentine attempts to give her one of the letters written at her request, she refuses it.

> Val. What means your ladyship? Do you not like it?
> Sil. Yes, yes. The lines are very quaintly writ;
> But, since unwillingly, take them again.
> Nay take them! [Gives back the letter.]
> Val. Madam, they are for you.

Sil. Ay, ay! you writ them, sir, at my request;
But I will none of them: they are for you.
I would have had them writ more movingly.
Val. Please you, I'll write your ladyship another.
Sil. And when it's writ, for my sake read it over;
And if it please you, so; if not, why, so!
Val. If it please me, madam, what then?
Sil. Why, if it please you, take it for your labour;
And so good morrow, servant.

(II, i, 127-39)

Speed interprets Silvia's actions for Valentine and for the audience.

Val. How now, sir? What are you reasoning with yourself?
Speed. Nay, I was rhyming; 'tis you that have the reason.
Val. To do what?
Speed. To be a spokesman from Madam Silvia.
Val. To whom?
Speed. To yourself. Why, she wooes you by a figure.
Val. What figure?
Speed. By a letter, I should say.
Val. Why, she hath not writ to me!
Speed. What need she, when she hath made you write to yourself? Why, do you not perceive the jest?

(II, i, 147-59)

The scene has the letter as a springboard for much repartee, but more significant, the letter device reveals in a dramatically ingenious and entertaining way Valentine's love and Silvia's true feelings. Speed merely underscores that information so that no one in the theater will fail to know the growing complications in the plot.

In the third act Proteus betrays his friend Valentine by telling the Duke that his daughter Silvia and Valentine are planning to elope that night. The Duke then

approaches Valentine asking his assistance in winning a lady whom the Duke "affects." Valentine suggests that the Duke climb to her window on a rope ladder which he might hide beneath his cloak. The Duke snatches off Valentine's cloak and finds a rope ladder and a love letter in verse to Silvia telling her, "Silvia, this night I will enfranchise thee." (III, i, 151) The Duke reads the letter aloud; here is proof of Valentine's treachery; Valentine is banished.

In Act IV, scene iv, Proteus sends Sebastian, the disguised Julia, as emissary to Silvia with a love letter and ring. Sebastian delivers a letter to Silvia but immediately snatches it back.

> Jul. Madam, please you peruse this letter.
> [Gives a letter.]
> Pardon me, madam! I have unadvis'd
> Deliver'd you a paper that I should not.
> This is the letter to your ladyship.
> [Gives another.]
> Sil. I pray thee let me look on that again.
> Jul. It may not be. Good madam, pardon!
> Sil. There, hold! [Gives back the first letter.]
> I will not look upon your master's lines.
> I know they are stuff'd with protestations
> And full of new-found oaths, which he will break
> As easily as I do tear his paper.
> [Tears the second letter.]
> (IV, iv, 126-36)

Obviously the first letter is an old love letter from Proteus to Julia, but Shakespeare nods apparently and nothing more is said of the wrong letter. The letter device has become a framework from which evolve the complicating episodes to the turning point. Thereafter, in the play the letter is abandoned for other conventions.

In The Merry Wives of Windsor eight very important letters cause the action. Sir Evans gives Simple a letter to deliver to Mistress Quickly saying, ". . . and the letter is to desire and require her to solicit your master's desires [Slender's] to mistress Anne Page." (I, ii, 8-10) This letter causes Dr. Caius to challenge Sir Evans to a duel. Meanwhile, Falstaff has written identical love letters to Mistress Ford and Mistress Page. Scenes ii, iii, and iv of Act I are devoted to letter writing and sending; Falstaff's intrigues and the Caius-Evans' impending duel are established by the letter device. In Act II Mistress Ford and Mistress Page compare their love letters and, finding them alike, plot revenge. The women succeed to the extent of getting the fat rogue carried out in the dirty linen basket. When Mistress Ford and Mistress Page show their husbands Falstaff's letters, all plan for harsher means of revenge. This time Falstaff has to lose his dignity in the disguise of Mother Prat. Later, only the letter from Mistress Quickly can lure Falstaff to the comic forest scene. The true love story is resolved when Fenton shows the Host of the Garter Inn a letter from Mistress Anne Page which explains her father's and Mother's machinations to force her marriage. Fenton implores the Host's aid by showing him the letter. During the play there are thirteen letters, eight of which are displayed and either read or explained on the stage.

In All's Well That Ends Well after young Bertram, the Count of Rousillon, has been forced by the King to marry Helena, he decides to desert his bride forever. He writes his mother,

> I have sent you a daughter-in-law. She hath recovered the King, and undone me. I have wedded her, not bedded her; and sworn to make the "not" eternal. You shall hear I am run away. Know it before the report come. If there be breadth enough in the world, I will hold a long distance. My duty to you.
>
> Your unfortunate son,
> Bertram.
> (III, i, 20-26)

Helena brings the letter to the old Countess who reads the letter on stage. Helena then reads her letter from Bertram. It confirms the news to the Countess, and at the same time, presents the almost impossible conditions by which Helena can control her wandering husband.

> When thou canst get the ring upon my finger which never shall come off, and show me a child begotten of thy body that I am father to, then call me husband; but in such a "then" I write a "never."
> (III, i, 59-63)

This second letter lays the plot for the remainder of the play. Sympathy for Helena results from the cruelty of those lines in the very handwriting of Bertram. After much suffering and sorrow, Helena is to read lines from this same letter at the end of the play when she has carried out the stipulations in order to regain her husband.

> O my good lord, when I was like this maid
> I found you wondrous kind. There is your ring,
> And look you, here's your letter. This it says:

'When from my finger you can get this ring,
And are by me with child,' &c. This is done.
Will you be mine now you are doubly won?
(V, iii, 309-14)

Earlier in the play Bertram discovers that his servant and boon companion Parolles is a "damnable both-sides rogue" (IV, iii, 251) when some conspiring Florentines seize him. Parolles' assumed bravery then dissolves and his calumnies catch up with him. The Florentine soldiers find a letter in verse that Parolles is carrying and read it; Bertram is present.

'Dian, the Count's a fool, and full of gold
. . . . . .
When he swears oaths, bid him drop gold, and
take it:
After he scores, he never pays the score.
Half won is match well made; match, and well
make it;
He ne'er pays after-debts, take it before;
and say a soldier, Dian, told thee this;
Men are to mell with, boys are not to kiss:
For count of this, the Count's a fool, I know it,
Who pays before, but not when he does owe it.

'Thine, as he vow'd to thee in thine ear,
(IV, iii, 252-60)

Through the revelations in this letter Parolles loses his influence over Bertram.

Most of the action of the play occurs at Rousillon, at the French King's palace, or at Florence. Much that is significant to the plot takes place off stage, and throughout the play this information is brought before the audience by letter. Such compression is vital in the genre so limited by time. When Helena steals away from Rousillon to

become a pilgrim to Saint Jaques, she tells the old Countess of her plans in a letter in sonnet form detailing her pilgrimage which may end in death. (III, iv, 4-18) Bertram receives a letter from his mother probably telling him of Helena's death. The soldiers comment on his reactions,

> 2. Lord. You have not given him his mother's letter?
> 1. Lord. I have deliv'red it an hour since. There is something in't that stings his nature; for on the reading it he chang'd almost into another man.
> (IV, iii, 1-10)

Later the soldiers discuss details of Helena's death which reach Florence by letter.

In this play there are twelve references to letters which carry information between the three important settings; five letters are read on the stage. At first the complication of the marriage is outlined by letter. The entanglement is partially resolved by letters when Bertram's eyes are opened to Parolles' lies. A resolution of the plot seems imminent when Helena is reported to be removed by death. The marriage problem is finally disentangled when Helena repeats Bertram's letter with the almost impossible conditions and proves she has won her husband on his terms.

The Tragedy of King Lear is another of the plays which make extensive use of the letter device. In the play there are twenty-two references to letters; eight are seen on the stage; four are read. Much of the plot develops in the letters. The Gloucester subplot begins with the forged letter Edmund craftily reveals to his father. Edmund con-

trives so that his father demands the letter. Gloucester then reads it aloud and interprets it as Edmund intends. Believing that his true son Edgar desires to kill his father and inherit the estate, Gloucester cries out, "Abhorred villain! Unnatural, detested, brutish villain." (I, ii, 81-82) The letter has set the subplot in motion.

Letters carry much of the intrigue in the central plot of Goneril and Regan versus Lear. "I'll write straight to my sister/ To hold my very course," says Goneril. (I, iii, 24-25) Later, before that letter can be sent, Goneril asks Oswald, "How now Oswald?/ What, have you writ that letter to my sister?" (I, iv, 357-58) The importance of Oswald thus figures early in the tragedy.

Meanwhile, Lear sends Kent with a letter to Regan. When Kent and Oswald meet and quarrel before the house of Gloucester where Regan is staying, Kent realizes that Regan is against Lear and does not deliver the letter. While in the stocks, Kent reads part of a letter from Cordelia which reveals that France will come to the aid of Lear--a determining force in the plot.

> . . . I know 'tis from Cordelia,
> Who hath most fortunately been inform'd
> Of my obscured course--and reads 'shall find
> time
> From this enormous state, seeking to give
> Losses their remedies'. . . .
> (II, ii, 173-77)

In Act III, scene iii, Gloucester puts his faith in Edmund by telling him,

> . . . I have received a letter this night--'tis dangerous to be spoken--I have lock'd the letter in my closet. These injuries the King now bears will be revenged home; there's part of a power already footed; we must incline to the King. I will seek him and privily relieve him. . . .
> (III, iii, 10-15)

This letter is vital in both the subplot and the main plot, for Edmund uses his information to betray his father. For his possession of this information, Gloucester is blinded by the Duke of Cornwall and Regan, and the Duke dies after being struck by a servant at the scene of the torture. Goneril receives letters informing her of the advance of France and the death of Cornwall, the turning point of the story.

The jealousy between Regan and Goneril for Edmund is underlined when Regan tries to bribe Oswald into giving to her Goneril's letter to Edmund. Finding this letter when he kills Oswald, Edgar gives it to the Duke of Albany. When Edmund falls before Edgar, Goneril chides him for answering the challenge of an unknown. The Duke turns to his wife with the letter, "Shut your mouth, dame,/ Or with this paper shall I stop it." (V, iii, 153-54) Goneril departs in desperation and poisons Regan before committing suicide. The letter is the device which reveals the deep jealousy between the sisters and, hence, brings about their deaths.

So different in appeal and intent as are such plays as The Two Gentlemen of Verona, The Merry Wives of Windsor,

All's Well That Ends Well, and The Tragedy of King Lear, it is interesting to observe that the plot in each play makes considerable use of the same device. It is almost a framework or web which binds complicated intrigues into structural form, sometimes by selecting and compressing, sometimes by underlining, sometimes by furthering the intrigue.

In the Poetics Aristotle has seen the letter as a form of Recognition, one "invented at will by the poet, and on that account wanting in art."[1] The exposition of the first scene given by letter in Much Ado About Nothing, the complication in the letters of Posthumus to Imogen in Cymbeline, the complications, revelations, resolutions by the device in Two Gentlemen of Verona may seem "less artistic modes of recognition," a token imposed by the author. However, in The Tragedy of King Lear, the letter device could never be termed superimposed. It becomes organically a part of the expanding revelation of evil, the basis of the play. Edmund's and Goneril's letters become more than "recognition invented at will by the poet," because they have a depth of meaning beyond their plot significance. The artistic development of the mature Shakespeare is revealed when one applies the comment of

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[1] J. H. Smith and Edd W. Parks (eds.), The Great Critics (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1932), pp. 19-20.

Aristotle to the art of Shakespeare. In the earlier plays as in Love's Labour's Lost and The Two Gentlemen of Verona the device may show a "wanting of art," but the letters in the plays on Lear, Hamlet, and Macbeth become an integral device, artistically true, assisting in character and theme development. (The use of the device in The Tragedy of Hamlet and The Tragedy of Macbeth is discussed in Chapter IV).

In some of the plays the device of the letter operates with almost climactic force, either positively or negatively in the conflict. The outcome of the issues seems speeded to conclusion or held in suspenseful abeyance by a letter. In The Merchant of Venice tensions result from the missives which bring good fortune and bad to the characters. The letter from Antonio to Bassanio telling of Antonio's losses and his forfeit bond plunges the emotions to despair.

> . . . Here is a letter, lady--
> The paper as the body of my friend,
> And every word in it a gaping wound
> issuing lifeblood.
>
> (III, ii, 263-66)

cries Bassanio as he shows the letter to Portia and the audience. The paper becomes a symbol of Antonio as he will be, weak and bloodless after paying his debt to Shylock. Bassanio reads the letter; all hope is gone.

> 'Sweet Bassanio, my ships have all miscarried, my creditors grow cruel, my estate is very low, my bond to the Jew is forfeit; and since in paying it, it is impossible I should live, all debts are clear'd

> between you and I if I might but see you at my death. Notwithstanding, use your pleasure. If your love do not persuade you to come, let not my letter.'
> (III, ii, 314-22)

The same device, however, later in the play brings the first sight of relief to the audience when Balthasar, the disguised Portia, is introduced as a learned doctor to substitute for Bellario. The forces of good now have a champion to fight in the darkest moments against the evil of Shylock. The letter now gives hope.

> 'Your Grace shall understand that at the receipt of your letter I am very sick; but in the instant that your messenger came, in loving visitation was with me a young doctor of Rome--his name is Balthasar. I acquainted him with the cause in controversy between the Jew and Antonio the merchant. He is furnished with my opinion, which, bettered with his own learning (the greatness whereof I cannot enough commend), comes with him at my importunity to fill up your Grace's request in my stead. . . .
> (IV, i, 150-61)

The play then ends on the highest note of joy when Portia brings letters to Antonio which prove that three of his argosies "are richly come to harbour suddenly." (V, i, 275)

In The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet when Friar Laurence learns that Friar John was unable to deliver the vital letter to Romeo, emotion comes to almost unendurable tension. Juliet lies in the darkened tomb, almost at her waking hour. Romeo has just purchased a suicidal drug, thinking his Juliet is dead. Friar Laurence hastens to the tomb to save Juliet, but the audience can sense the impending doom since the letter was not delivered.

At the end of The Tragedy of Othello, The Moor of Venice, after Othello has murdered the innocent Desdemona, he learns the enormity of the evil spell under which he murdered when certain letters, found in Roderigo's pockets, are presented to him. These letters reveal Iago's villainy--written proof which is tangible to him and to the audience. The letter, then, frequently influences the emotional response desired by the varying turns in the plot brought about by letters.

CHAPTER IV

THE LETTER AND CHARACTER

However well the Elizabethan spectator loved a story, consciously or subconsciously he was interested in character, or perhaps man in action. As evidence of this interest are not only those soul-searching creations of Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, Hieronimo, and Dr. Faustus, but also the excellent interpretations of Richard III, Richard II, and Henry IV. These plays were stories of men, of kings, whose loves and events were known, intimately by a considerable portion of the audience, and certainly in outline form by the uneducated. Books popular in the era as The Fall of Princes, The Mirror for Magistrates, and The Lives of Plutarch stand as testimony that the Elizabethan recognized the drama in human life. Life, barren of the newspapers and popular magazines filled with news of human activity, was made full and satisfying with the character creations of the drama.

> Drama which does not rise above interest in its action rests, as had been said, on the idea that most people are simple, uncomplicated, and easy to understand. Great drama depends on a firm grasp

and sure presentation of complicated character. . . .[1] Man faced by moral and ethical problems, sometimes comic, sometimes insurmountably tragic, was the starting point for dramatic activity then and now. How he conquered and survived or was defeated and died molds the story. Great drama requires careful portrayal of character to focus the attention, the sympathy of the audience.[2] Dramatic art exists not only in showing the outer man "strutting his hour" upon the boards but also in revealing the inner man struggling with his petty frustrations, his conscience, or his destiny.[3] The magic curtain of a theater when drawn on a great play becomes a veil stripped from a mind, a heart, a soul. Seeing into the inner man and presenting him with all his foibles or his greatness for the audience to know intimately is the basic problem for the dramatist. Working out the problems of his comic or tragic existence within an hour and a half of playing time is the strategy of play writing.[4]

The introduction, gradual exposition, and final

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[1] George Pierce Baker, Dramatic Technique (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1919), p. 238.

[2] Ibid., p. 233.

[3] Harley Granville-Barker, Prefaces to Shakespeare (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1946), I, 7.

[4] Baker, The Development of Shakespeare As A Dramatist, p. 22.

stripping of all shields from the personality of the character can be accomplished by various devices. Fundamentally, however, the character in action is the test of the man. Yet the groundwork for the intimate knowledge and understanding of the character is laid by other means, many well known by the sixteenth and seventeenth century dramatists. Perhaps in the Elizabethan play the soliloquy seems pre-eminent in the unmasking of character. When Iago and Richard III are alone on the stage, they talk straight to the spectators or to the young gallants on the edge of the stage. These evil characters unbosom themselves in soliloquy.[1] The "aside" given by the protagonist or subsidiary character frequently exhibited hidden motivation.[2] The comment of one actor on the action of another, opinions of friends and foes, contrast of characters are other means by which the dramatist may illuminate facets of character. The character who seemingly moves only on the stage becomes an intimate and immediate part of the human experience of the spectator. They are experiencing life together for the period of an hour or two.

Within this category of devices stands the letter.

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[1] M. C. Bradbrook, Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy (Cambridge: University Press, 1935), p. 3.

[2] Cleanth Brooks and Robert B. Heilman, Understanding Drama (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1945), p. 487.

By means of the letter, the author may reveal motives hidden so well within the ego that the character himself may be unaware of his own strength or weakness. Within the framework of the letter may appear comments and opinions concerning other people living in the illusionary age of the play. Letters may tell truth or untruth. The written communication from one off the scene underscores his influence within the scene.

In The Tragedy of Macbeth appears only one letter, but that letter serves a most significant function. In Act I, scene v, Lady Macbeth enters alone, reading:

> 'They met me in the day of success; and I have learn'd by the perfect'st report they have more in them than mortal knowledge. When I burn'd in desire to question them further, they made themselves air, into which they vanish'd. Whiles I stood rapt in the wonder of it, came missives from the King, who all-hail'd me Thane of Cawdor, by which title, before, these Weird Sisters saluted me, and referr'd me to the coming on of time with "Hail, King that shalt be!" This have I thought good to deliver thee, my dearest partner of greatness, that thou mightst not lose the dues of rejoicing by being ignorant of what greatness is promis'd thee. Lay it to thy heart, and farewell.'
>
> (I, v, 1-15)

Since the medium of drama is an association of author, actor, and spectator, not printed page, silent reading of the play is only half the song, the music without the words. The letter is the means by which Lady Macbeth reveals her inner nature. Through her gestures and tone of voice as well as her comments, she begins the de-naturing of her

humanity that gives her power in her evil.[1]

Primarily, however, the letter, intimate correspondence between a man and his wife, reveals the inner man. In the first four scenes the witches have appeared; the king has planned to award Macbeth; Macbeth and Banquo have heard the prophecy of the witches; Macbeth has received the praise of the king and at the end of scene iv takes leave of the king to arrange for the royal visit at Inverness. When Lady Macbeth reads the letter, not only the words but the handwriting stand as double evidence for Macbeth's character. It is a proud letter beginning with his "day of success" and containing such phrases as "all-hailed me Thane of Cawdor," and "partner of greatness." "I have learn'd by perfect'st report. . . ." says Macbeth of the validity of the witches. If he means that the report that he is now Thane of Cawdor is proof positive that the witches tell no lies, he is rationalizing from the first since the only standard for "perfect'st report" is his own opinion. The only further inference is that he has attempted to discover whether the witches regularly inhabit the lonely heath and give prophecies of some validity. The indications are that Macbeth believes what he wants to believe. He ignores the fact that if the witches are true for Macbeth, they are

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[1] Roy Walker, The Time Is Free: a Study of Macbeth (London: Dakers, 1949), p. 45.

also true for Banquo. Macbeth is proud of his advancements; he has already thought of kingship. His pride in himself reflects in his reiteration of "greatness." Finally, he closes with an exuberance of spirit,". . . that thou mightest not lose the dues of rejoicing by being ignorant of what greatness is promis'd thee." The letter infers that Macbeth and his wife have conversed at some earlier time on this subject of ambition or future advancement; otherwise, it seems strange that Macbeth would use the term "partner in greatness." It is obvious, however, that Lady Macbeth reads only the last of the letter.

Lady Macbeth has reason to say, "I fear thy nature." She is aware, as the audience must be, that Macbeth sees only the crown without seeing the need for removing all barriers to that crown. The letter reveals Macbeth almost childishly reporting his accomplishments, expecting an award, hoping for encouragement and advice on how to attain that "golden round." The spectators see a Macbeth almost naively hoping that he can get what he wants without challenging destiny, ". . . and referr'd me to the coming on of time with 'Hail, King thou shalt be!'"

The letter allows Lady Macbeth's true character to mushroom. Her comments on the letter set her apart as a human witch more evil than the supernatural hags of the heath. She sees the implications immediately and describes

her husband's "vaulting ambition" by which he hopes to be great without the "illness that would attend."

On the level of characterization perhaps it could be said that Macbeth fears to allow his wife to know the prophecy concerning Banquo for several reasons. He may fear her intensity of action; he may fear to put that prophecy into words hoping that if he does not think of it, it will fail to exist. But on the level of dramatic technique, the failure to mention that complication at this time saves the suspense of the Banquo problem for later development after Duncan has been removed. Again, there is dramatic irony here because the audience knows what Lady Macbeth does not know. A tension has been set up whereby the audience if it could speak would be able to stop the ensuing tragic events.

The letter has been the means of revealing Macbeth's pride and ambition with his nature "too full of th' milk of human kindness" to ride unspurred to the crown. At the same time it introduces Lady Macbeth and gives her an opportunity to appeal to the "spirits of mortal thought" to fill her "from crown to the toe, top-full of direct cruelty."

In The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, three epistles are of vital significance to a thorough comprehension of the tragedy. These letters illuminate not only the involvements of the plot but also the development of the characters. Written by Hamlet and read and discussed by others, the letters offer some insight into the

complex, mystifying character of the protagonist. They stand close to the soliloquy in providing an inroad to the heart of the man. Addressed to his friend and confidant, Horatio, to his love, Ophelia, and to his uncle Claudius, the three letters disclose three variant facets in Hamlet's nature. In an examination of these letters, it may be well to be cognizant of the fact that although the missives were sent to convey information, the chief function of the letter, Shakespeare mastered his craft so well that he was able to utilize such material as vital in many functions.

Hamlet "has probably exerted greater fascination, and certainly been the subject of more discussions, than any other in the whole world," says A. C. Bradley.[1] The character of Hamlet has variously been interpreted by literary critics as madman or hero, and by actors in an equally liberal fashion. Coleridge finds Hamlet as the victim of "an overbalance in the contemplative faculty," "a creature of mere meditation" without his "natural power of action."

> In Hamlet he seems to have wished to exemplify the moral necessity of a due balance between our attention to the objects of our senses, and our meditation on the workings of our minds--an equilibrium between the real and the imaginary worlds. In Hamlet this balance is distrubed: his thoughts, and the images of his fancy, are far more vivid than his

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[1] A. C. Bradley, Shakesperean Tragedy (New York: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1905), p. 90.

> actual perceptions, and his very perceptions, instantly passing through the medium of his contemplations, acquire, as they pass, a form and a colour not naturally their own. Hence we see a great, an almost enormous, intellectual activity, and a proportionate aversion to real action, consequent upon it, with all its symptoms and accompanying qualities. This character Shakespeare places in circumstances, under which it is obliged to act on the spur of the moment; --Hamlet is brave and careless of death, but he vacillates from sensibility, and procrastinates from thought, and loses the power of action in the energy of resolve.[1]

To Hazlitt Hamlet was "not a character marked by strength of will or even of passion, but by refinement of thought and sentiment."

> He seems incapable of deliberate action, and is only hurried into extremities on the spur of the occasion, when he has no time to reflect. . . . At other times, when he is most bound to act, he remains puzzled, undecided, and sceptical, dallies with his purposes, till the occasion is lost, and finds out some pretence to relapse into indolence and thoughtfulness again. . . .[2]

A. C. Bradley sees the basis for the interpretation of Hamlet from the psychological point of view as one of melancholy but hastily adds that this pathological condition would "excite little, if any tragic interest if it were not the condition of a nature distinguished by that speculative genius on which the Schlegel-Coleridge type of theory lays stress."

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[1] F. E. Halliday, Shakespeare and His Critics (London: Gerald Duckworth and Co., 1950), p. 418.

[2] Ibid., p. 419.

> Such theories misinterpret the connection between that genius and Hamlet's failure, but still it is this connection which gives to his story its peculiar fascination and makes it appear (if the phrase may be allowed) as the symbol of a tragic mystery inherent in human nature. Wherever this mystery touches us, wherever we are forced to feel the wonder and awe of man's godlike 'apprehension' and his 'thoughts that wander through eternity,' and at the same time are forced to see him powerless in his petty sphere of action, and powerless (it would appear) from the very divinity of his thought, we remember Hamlet.[1]

In her systematic examination of the imagery of the play, Caroline Spurgeon finds in Hamlet that "anguish is not the dominating thought, but rottenness."

> ". . . the problem in Hamlet is not predominantly that of will and reason, of a mind too philosophic or a nature temperamentally unfitted to act quickly; he /Shakespeare/ sees it pictorially, <u>not as the problem of an individual at all</u>, but as something greater and even more mysterious, as a <u>condition</u> for which the individual himself is apparently not responsible. . . . That is the tragedy of Hamlet, as it is, perhaps, the chief tragic mystery of life.[2]

In the <u>Prefaces to Shakespeare</u> the play is labelled a "tragedy of inaction; the center of it is Hamlet, who is physically inactive too."[3] According to J. Dover Wilson much of the action of Hamlet may be explained by the "antic disposition."

> The tragic burden has done its work, and he is conscious that he no longer retains perfect control over himself. What more natural than that he should conceal his nervous breakdown behind a mask which

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[1] Bradley, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. 127.

[2] Caroline Spurgeon, <u>Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us</u> (New York: Macmillan Co., 1936), pp. 318-19).

[3] Granville-Barker, <u>Prefaces to Shakespeare</u>, I, 29.

> would enable him to let himself go when the fit is upon him?[1]

Hamlet is the story of a man, "a genius caught fast in the toils of circumstances and unable to fling free."[2] The burden Hamlet must bear is the problem of the ghost, the murder, the incest.

> This incest-business is so important that it is scarcely possible to make too much of it. Shakespeare places it in the very forefront of the play, he devotes a whole soliloquy to it, he shows us Hamlet's mind filled with the fumes of its poison, writhing in anguish, longing for death as an escape.[3]

Roy Walker finds Hamlet not a man burdened by over speculation or inaction but one waiting for the time to be auspicious for his action.

> The ultimate answer is that Hamlet did not delay. Only in his weaker moments did he conceive his duty to be no more than the murder of his uncle. His innermost consciousness was struggling towards the realization of order in human affairs, the insight he finally expressed in the few simple words 'There's a divinity that shapes our ends' and 'The readiness is all'. Within the world of the play, Hamlet is not deluded that in that conviction he is overwhelmingly right. Rough-hew them how he will, destiny shapes his ends. He holds his hand until the real opportunity comes.[4]

To these many and varied views of the character

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[1] J. Dover Wilson, What Happens in Hamlet (Cambridge: University Press, 1951), p. 92.

[2] Ibid., p. 39.

[3] Ibid., p. 43.

[4] Roy Walker, The Time Is Out of Joint: a Study of Hamlet (London: Andrew Dakers, Ltd., 1948), p. 152.

of Hamlet, his written words may bring further insight. In his letter to Horatio, Hamlet informs Horatio and the audience of much that has transpired not only in external events but in Hamlet's own soul. Ostensibly, Claudius has sent Hamlet to England accompanied by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, but in reality he has sent Hamlet to a date with death. For three scenes (v, vi, vii) of Act IV, Hamlet is not seen on the stage, but in scenes vi and vii Hamlet's letters appear. The impact of the character of Hamlet dominates all of scene vi in the long letter to Horatio. The audience again focuses attention on Hamlet after the mad scene of Ophelia. The audience hears Hamlet speak vicariously and his written words bring assurance to calm their suspense.

The letter brings news of much plot development and a direct change in the planned events. Hamlet does not die but thwarts the king quite skillfully. The threat to Hamlet's life and his subsequent escape is a plot complication with a purpose. Why did Shakespeare increase the complexity?

> By crowding his plays with story, he strove to keep his audience attentive even as his scenes developed states of mind in some central figure or figures. And those states of mind he pictures by action.[1]

Here Shakespeare gives Hamlet ample opportunity for coming

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[1] Baker, The Development of Shakespeare As A Dramatist, p. 279.

to a resolution. If Hamlet is a victim of inaction, of over speculation, of melancholy, of time, his removal on the sea voyage has given him objective sight of the problem he must face.

The letter shows the new Hamlet. Earlier after the Mousetrap scene Hamlet has begun to see his path. "O good Horatio, I'll take the ghost's word for a thousand pound!" he exclaims exultingly, and then calls for music. But in the letter Hamlet has the same realization of his reason, his need, for action. Now, however, he has steel in him. As "the exit of the king 'marvellous distempered' /ăt the end of the Gonzago play/ is the turning-point of Hamlet,"[1] so the letter is the turning-point in the character.

> Horatio, when thou shalt have overlook'd this, give these fellows some means to the King. They have letters for him. Ere we were two days old at sea, a pirate of very warlike appointment gave us chase. Finding ourselves too slow of sail, we put on a compelled valour, and in the grapple I boarded them. On the instant they got clear of our ship: so I alone became their prisoner. They have dealt with me like thieves of mercy; but they knew what they did: I am to do a good turn for them. Let the King have the letters I have sent, and repair thou to me with as much speed as thou wouldest fly death. I have words to speak in thine ear will make thee dumb; yet are they much too light for the bore of the matter. These good fellows will bring thee where I am. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern hold their course for England. Of them I have much to tell thee.
> Farewell.
> He that thou knowest thine, HAMLET.
> (IV, vi, 11-31)

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[1] Wilson, op. cit., p. 200.

The sentences show a mastery of compression and rapidity of movement. Short and simple with none of his characteristic repetitions, Hamlet rushes through a long story in a short time. He has acted once and tasted triumph. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern will have their punishment, "put to sudden death,/ Not shriving time allow'd." (V, ii, 46-47) He is prepared for further action and is almost pathetically beaten back to his former impetuosity in sorrow for the last time when he sees the bier of Ophelia.

"I have words to speak in thine ear will make thee dumb." What are these words to which Hamlet refers? Not of Rosencrantz, not of the ghost. Perhaps he wishes Horatio to recognize that he has accepted a philosophy that will give him direction. Later he tells Horatio,

> Methought I lay
> Worse than the mutines in the bilboes. Rashly--
> And prais'd be rashness for it; let us know,
> Our indiscretion sometime serves us well
> When our deep plots do pall; and that should
> learn us
> There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough-hew them how we will--
> (V, ii, 3-11)

Or perhaps he has a plot which he is unable to communicate to Horatio before the interruption of Osric in scene ii of Act V. Nevertheless, the letter shows a new tempo in the Hamlet character.

Claudius, too, receives a letter written at the same time.

> High and Mighty,--You shall know I am set naked on your kingdom. To-morrow shall I beg leave to see your kingly eyes; when I shall (first asking your pardon thereunto) recount the occasion of my sudden and more strange return.
>
> HAMLET.
>
> (IV, vii, 43-49)

No doubt there is satire in the address, not lost on Shakespeare's audience with its consciousness of such popular books as The Mirror for Magistrates published in numerous editions from 1559-1610.[1] Laertes asks, "Know you the hand?" To this the king replies, "'Tis Hamlet's character, 'Naked!'" On the surface the king refers to the handwriting, but the word "Naked" holds hidden force. There is double meaning; the king has seen behind the mask of the "antic disposition." Hamlet comes stripped for action, stripped from the clothes of his former life; like a new-born babe he is a "new" figure entering the scene. Satire again touches in "kingly eyes." The audience knows Claudius is no king; he is an imposter, murderer of the king. ". . . I shall (first begging your pardon thereunto) recount the occasion of my sudden and more strange return." Pardon for what? For his return when Claudius had sent him to his death? Hamlet had seen the commission to England to execute him and had changed that order to apply to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern using his father's signet ring. (V, ii, 30-50)

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[1] J. William Hebel and Hoyt H. Hudson, Poetry of the English Renaissance (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1929), p. 923.

The letter dramatically displays character, not only of Hamlet but of Claudius.

In the Prefaces to Shakespeare it is pointed out that Shakespeare turns time to dramatic use, sometimes ignoring it, sometimes remarking on its passing, sometimes falsifying it.[1] The letters figure importantly in this dramatic use of time.

> Only with news of Hamlet do we revert to the calendar, and then with good reason. By setting a certain time for his return, the tension of the action is automatically increased. First, in the letter to Horatio, the past is built up. . . . Then, in a letter to the King. . . the resumption of the war between them is made imminent. The scene in the graveyard thus takes place on the morrow. . . . The general effect produced --not, and it need not be, a very marked one--is of events moving steadily now, unhurriedly, according to plan. . . .[2]

A third letter by Hamlet figures importantly in the play. It has been described as the "most loving letter written by Shakespeare"[3] and as a "savage parody of love."

> . . . Hamlet's repudiation of Ophelia is a rejection of a simple romantic love which cannot survive in the stress of what has come later; the letter he sends her is a savage parody (sane or insane, it does not matter) of that early uncritical adoration, and incidentally of the kind of poetry which expressed it ("To the Celestiall, and my Soules Idoll, the

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[1] Granville-Barker, Prefaces to Shakespeare, I, 39.

[2] Ibid., p. 43.

[3] Myra B. Martin, "Shakespeare, Writer of Letters," Shakespeare Association Bulletin, V (October, 1930), 178.

> most beautified Ophelia"--"an ill phrase, a vile phrase", says the critical Polonius); and her description of him, as he had been before the storm blew up, is a description of the ideal youth of the Renaissance court, the unspoiled unreal beauty of Castiglione's Courtier, the Adonis of the Sonnets. . . .[1]

Polonius reads the love letter to Claudius and the queen to convince them that Hamlet suffers from "hot love on the wing."

> 'To the celestial, and my soul's idol, the most beautified Ophelia'--
>
> That's an ill phrase, a vile phrase; 'beautified' is a vile phrase. But you shall hear. Thus:
>
> 'In her excellent white bosom, these, &c,'
>
> Queen. Came this from Hamlet to her?
>
> Pol. Good madam, stay awhile. I will be faithful.
>
> 'Doubt thou the stars are fire;
> Doubt that the sun doth move;
> Doubt truth to be a liar;
> But never doubt I love.
> 'O dear Ophelia, I am ill at these numbers; I have not art to reckon my groans; but that I love thee best, O most best, believe it. Adieu.
> 'Thine evermore, most dear lady, whilst this machine is to him, HAMLET.'
> (II, ii, 109-24)

The uncertainty as to whether or not the letter was one received before Polonius charged Ophelia to reject all letters from Hamlet has lead to the various interpretations of the letter.

Little by little he comes to the point, reads out part

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[1] Patrick Cruttwell, The Shakespearean Moment (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), p. 37.

of one of Hamlet's letters and demurs at the phrase, '"the most beautified Ophelia,"--That's an ill phrase, a vile phrase; "beautified" is a vile phrase.' Thus Shakespeare links the report of Hamlet's gazing on Ophelia's beautiful face in the preceding scene and Hamlet's frenzied 'God hath given you one face and you make yourselves another' in the nunnery scene afterwards, which Polonius is now about to prepare. This is why Polonius is made to interrupt himself and comment on the phrase. Hamlet, writing after his father's death but before Ophelia's cruel treatment of him, speaks of her as beautified, made beautiful by the nature within which is reflected faithfully in her lovely appearance. Hamlet is tormented now by the belief that he was mistaken. The beautiful face does not faithfully reflect Ophelia's nature any more, does not draw its beauty from her nature. It is the mask of corrupted nature, the demon of appearances, which he can no longer distinguish from features truly beautified by the inner nature, if indeed such inward beauty lives on anywhere in Denmark since his father's death.[1]

Quite another view is expressed by J. Dover Wilson:

Half an hour later Polonius is. . . reading aloud to them [the King and Queen] one of Hamlet's love-letters. In the general bewilderment concerning the relations between Hamlet and Ophelia some have even believed that this letter is intended to be ironical, and have fastened upon the word "beautified" as evidence of this, comparing it with "I have heard of your paintings", etc., at 3, I, 145-7. But (i) the letter must have been written before Ophelia "repelled" Hamlet's correspondence, and (ii) Polonius's condemnation of "beautified" is sufficient to show that it is an innocent word. As a matter of fact it simply means "beautiful" or "endowed with beauty" and is so used by Shakespeare himself in The Two Gentlemen of Verona (4. I. 55-6: "Seeing you are beautified With goodly shape.") and elsewhere. We may take it, therefore, that the letter is a genuine, if characteristic, love-letter, perhaps one of the earlier ones of the series.[2]

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[1] Roy Walker, The Time Is Out of Joint, p. 49.

[2] Wilson, op. cit., pp. 112-13.

William G. Meader states,

> This is a letter which contains more matter than art, more sincerity than poetry. The verse is obviously extravagant and in bad taste, as both Shakespeare and Hamlet realize.[1]

Before Act II, scene ii, in which the letter is read Hamlet and Ophelia have not been together on the stage. Their love has been discussed by Laertes and Ophelia and by Polonius and Ophelia when she relates Hamlet's "mad" scene with her. Now for the first time there are words from Hamlet to Ophelia on the subject of love. This is the first opportunity for Shakespeare to give valid evidence in Hamlet's own words that love had once existed between them. That fact would have to be established for the audience before a parody could be successful. The letter is the means by which the author gives a view of earlier character relationships before the tragic events have been set in motion. It seems, therefore, consideration may be given to the letter as a merely badly or childishly written, playful love note. "Pleasant foolishness," says Granville-Barker.[2] That it was a letter sent before Ophelia was ordered to reject the letters seems the logical conclusion because Ophelia strives always to obey her father against the dictates of her own heart, and, hence, would not receive a

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[1] Meader, op. cit., p. 150.

[2] Granville-Barker, Prefaces to Shakespeare, I, 235.

letter after her father's injunction. Later she is not honest to Hamlet when Polonius uses her for a test of Hamlet in Act III, scene i, because she feels filial devotion to her father's demands.

The style is the key. The letter gives an indication that Hamlet was once a lover carefree and playful, conscious of what a lovely but young girl would like to receive. Perhaps Shakespeare felt that he must make Hamlet aware subconsciously of Ophelia's limitations, her youth and her inexperience. It is in the style of courtly love with the high flown praise, the Euphuistic balance and alliteration popular in the writing of the sixteenth century. Hamlet is "merely following the fashion of the courtiers about him."

> . . . Shakespeare's own fondness for this kind of play, like the fondness of the theatrical audience for it, diminished with time. But the main reason is surely that this tendency, as we see it in Hamlet, betokens a nimbleness and flexibility of mind which is characteristic of him and not of the later less many-sided heroes.[1]

The use of this fantastic love language gives insight into the kind of reaction Shakespeare wanted to establish in the audience. For those in the Globe, as for all readers of the play since its first night, there is an awareness of delay on the part of Hamlet. That audience could have become impatient to the point of catcalls and shouts. Perhaps this

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[1] Bradley, op. cit., p. 150.

letter gave birth to a sympathetic emotion Shakespeare wanted to engender. "All the world loves a lover," he wrote and was mindful of that fact with Hamlet. Here was a fashionable young man writing in the language of the day to his loved one, and the spectators were being prepared emotionally to wait for the revenge they felt Claudius deserved. This interpretation underscores the irony in the tragedy of Ophelia's later inability to give empathic response to Hamlet in his hour of need.

The last of the letter, the prose part, has a ring of genuine sincerity. It is echoed later in Act V, scene i, when Hamlet declares at the grave of Ophelia,

> I lov'd Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers
> Could not (with all their quantity of love)
> Make up my sum. What wilt thou do for her?

In the last line of the letter Hamlet refers to himself as "machine." Dowden believes Hamlet is indulging in intellectuality. This word may relate to the image in the soliloquy,

> The time is out of joint, O cursed spite
> That ever I was born to set it right!
> (I, v, 189-90)

Hamlet sees himself as some objective thing that is created for the use, the purpose of rearranging a vast impersonal, but muddled Time. In the letter he is a "machine," a tool, an object. The letter then was probably sent after the ghost has given Hamlet the burden of revenge but before Polonius forces Ophelia to "repel" the letters and before

Hamlet has seen Ophelia as failing to give him comfort.

One letter in all of Shakespeare's works which touches the very depths of evil is the letter of Goneril to Edmund. In a "tragedy in which evil is shown in the greatest abundance; and the evil characters are peculiarly repellent from their savagery,"[1] Goneril's expression of the lust and murder in her heart gives the final turn to the emotional abhorrence of evil engendered throughout the play. She has constantly ignored all law, convention, degree, and order in her manipulation of power, and now feeling she may be thwarted by her husband and her sister Regan, she reverts to the animal nature in her desire for Edmund. Regan, now a widow, may stand in her path as Edmund could marry Regan and gain half the kingdom. The Duke of Albany she has found far from her equal. She writes to Edmund, sending the letter by Oswald.

> Let our reciprocal vows be remembr'ed. You have many opportunities to cut him off. If you will want not, time and place will be fruitfully offr'd. There is nothing done, if he return the conqueror. Then am I the prisoner, and his bed my jail; from the loathed warmth whereof deliver me, and supply the place for your labour.
> Your (wife, so I would say) affectionate servant,
> GONERIL.
> (IV, vi, 266-79)

How does the letter coming late in the play, Act IV, scene vi, add even more to a character's manifest evil?

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[1] Bradley, op. cit., p. 303.

Throughout the play Shakespeare has emphasized through the imagery the animal portion of Goneril, Regan, and Edmund.

> Much of the animal imagery is employed. . . to emphasize the ferocity and bestiality into which human beings can fall. More than a dozen times the imagery is thus used to categorize Goneril and Regan. Their actions speak for themselves, of course; but the figures used, aside from heightening the characterization, serve to indicate that other dramatis personae can qualify the sisters only by metaphors from the animal kingdom.[1]

> In one of his mad speeches Edgar describes himself as "hog in sloth, fox in stealth, wolf in greediness, dog in madness, lion in prey" (III, iv, 95-96). . . . Not only is such a catalogue a useful auxiliary way of stressing the sense of evil that permeates the play, but it also--even in Edgar's incoherent speech --ties in with and supports the animal imagery of the rest of the play: man in his sins is animal-like.[2]

Goneril wants Edmund and intends to have him in spite of any obstacle, as an animal stalks for the kill moved only by a jungle law of conquer and kill. She knows no convention of marriage or law against lust and murder.

Furthermore, the letter shows the scope of evil. Goneril, Regan, and Edmund have upset degree and place in an ordered universe. They have broken the laws of nature and God in their cruelty. They have brought war to the kingdom. They have ruthlessly destroyed filial respect for the father. They have ruined the order of the family. They have moved rough shod over those for whom they are

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[1] Robert B. Heilman, This Great Stage (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1948), p. 93.

[2] Ibid., p. 99.

responsible. Now in the letter Goneril wishes to destroy the marriage order. The ruthless destruction of this institution is again an example of Shakespeare's recognition that upsetting of the Renaissance belief in order and degree is tragic. Goneril plans to break the last tie in human law with a thorough expression of animal passion.

> What King Lear says about the nature of Nature parallels what is said about the nature of man. . . it presents a twofold view of each subject. Man may give way to the animal, or he may realize his humanity; nature may be viewed as uncriticized motive, or as a total order that it is perilous to violate. Impulse, desire, appetite--if these are the sole reality, they lead man to the animal; but by the acceptance of order as the final reality, man becomes human. That is his ripeness.[1]

In The Famous History of the Life of King Henry the Eighth, Shakespeare is careful to set up the character of Cardinal Wolsey early in the play. In Act I, scene i, the Duke of Norfolk declares to the Duke of Buckingham:

> I advise you
> (And take it from a heart that wishes towards you
> honour and plenteous safety) that you read
> The Cardinal's malice and his potency
> Together; to consider further, that
> What his high hatred would effect wants not
> A minister in his power. You know his nature,
> That he's revengeful; and I know his sword
> Hath a sharp edge; it's long, and 't may be said
> It reaches far, and where 'twill not extend,
> Thither he darts it.
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> (I, i, 102-12)

However, before the audience of the Globe the letter of the groom to the Lord Chamberlain brings factual evidence

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[1] Ibid., pp. 127-28.

of the Cardinal's pride and greed. It is the opinion of one of lowly origin on the great Cardinal, designed to impress those spectators of less important rank. Certainly it is convincing and apt in the phrase "which stopp'd our mouths." Wolsey is quickly and accurately characterized by the letter device.

Enter Lord Chamberlain, reading this letter.

> Cham. 'My Lord,--The horses your lordship sent for, with all the care I had, I saw well chosen, ridden, and furnish'd. They were young and handsome and of the best breed in the North. When they were ready to set out for London, a man of my Lord Cardinal's by commission and main power took 'em from me, with this reason--his master would be serv'd before a subject, if not before the King; which stopp'd our mouths, sir.'
>
> (II, ii, 1-10)

In the delineation of character, Shakespeare realized that the epistolary device was one that had dramatic potentiality. Because it is written evidence, it tends to give additional validity. The written word has always maintained an almost magic power over human opinion. Within the framework of a play it adds significance to characterization not only for this hold on man's thinking but also for the attention it receives. When Horatio reads the message from Hamlet, for instance, attention is doubled. Horatio as a character on the stage receives his due attention, but when he opens the letter to read it, there is that extra emphasis concomitant to any material being read. The actor's eyes are on the paper; therefore, the paper is the target of

all eyes. Imaginatively the writer of the letter is envisioned by the audience. His words, given vicariously, create him within the mind of the spectator. Since the spectator must listen more carefully for material being read and at the same time exercise his own imagination, the written words are of considerable effectiveness in shaping character. Needless to say, letters will be in the first person; hence, the audience in imaginatively projecting the absent character through his own words does so in the first person and, thus, is enabled to apprehend that character intimately.

CHAPTER V

DRAMATIC EFFECTIVENESS OF THE LETTER

The epistolary device in the plays has an effect less tangible to circumscribe than its usefulness in the development of plot and character. It contributes to the atmosphere, the stage action, the dramatic attractiveness of the staged play. It is a well-spring of much comic activity, of realistic illusion, of interest, sheer entertainment, often difficult to capture in a silent reading. If the play is envisioned in its native medium--the stage, the letter device then advances in dramatic effectiveness. On the stage the letter becomes as influential as a character: it has words which are voiced; it has movement, often significant passing from hand to hand, sometimes surreptitiously sometimes overtly; it draws attention to its reader and to its composer--a double power. It is a stage property often used at front and center rather than in the background.

The Two Gentlemen of Verona makes considerable use of the written communication for many reasons. Early in the play, Act I, scene ii, Julia receives a letter from her

beloved Proteus. The complications and intrigues to develop later in the play have not yet been voiced. Here is the young dramatist trying to make an effective beginning.

> When the dramatist sets out, his invention is not yet warm. He desires to be in motion, but shrinks involuntarily from the strain. When this feeling is overcome and his conceptions begin to stir, he is met by a fresh difficulty, not peculiar to his art: the necessity to be explicit without being dull. There are things to be explained before the play can go on. The audience must know the facts; and the facts must be communicated, willingly or unwillingly, in some sort of narrative, which is a thing of all others the most abhorrent to the stage.[1]

According to George Pierce Baker, the young Shakespeare gives evidence of amateurish delay in getting the play underway.

> It takes this dramatist. . . two acts, including some ten scenes, to state the relations of Proteus, Valentine, Silvia, and Julia; to bring the first three together at the Court; to prepare us for the coming of the fourth; and to introduce us to Launce and Speed. He would have done all this in at the most three scenes a few years later. . . .[2]

Of the one hundred and forty lines in Act I, scene ii, approximately one hundred are devoted to the love letter and Julia's response. Much information is given, as for instance, Julia's assumed pose of scorn for Proteus, a requirement of the courtly love tradition. Yet in a critical

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[1] George Gordon, Shakespearian Comedy (London: Oxford University Press, 1945), p. 75.

[2] Baker, The Development of Shakespeare as a Dramatist, p. 118.

survey of the play it seems that there is considerable lag in getting the action started. It is possible that Shakespeare was conscious of the necessity for some stage activity to entertain the spectators and prevent them from realizing that the play lacked speed at this point.

The "Felix and Felismena" story in the Diana Enamorada by Jorge de Montemayor has been seen as one of the sources for the play. Shakespeare could have used an English or French translation.[1] In the "Felix and Felismena," Felix falls in love and sends a letter to the fair Felismena by her maid. The mistress refuses the missive; however, the maid, realizing her mistress' desire to read it, slyly drops it where Felismena may discover it.[2] In a study of the letter device in the first act of the play, it has been pointed out that Shakespeare did more than adapt from Montemayor this handling of the letter.[3] In the De Duobus Amantibus (1444) by Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (Pope Pius II), the use of the written message is much like that of the play. The heroine, Lucres, receives a letter from Eurialus with whom she is secretly in love, but she scolds the messenger and tears the missive to

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[1] E. K. Chambers, William Shakespeare (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), I, 351.

[2] John A. Guinn, "The Letter Device in the First Act of The Two Gentlemen of Verona," University of Texas Publication, July 8, 1940, p. 73.

[3] Ibid., p. 72.

pieces, treads on the pieces, spits on them, and casts them into the ashes. Later repenting her action she fits the pieces together, reads the note, and kisses it a thousand times.[1]

> On the assumption that the letter device in The Two Gentlemen of Verona came from "The Shepherdess Felismena," and that Montemayor received it directly from De Duobus Amantibus, Shakespeare could be said to be indebted at second hand to Aeneas Sylvius.
>
> Piccolomini's novel was not only available to Shakespeare in many foreign-language versions, but had been published in English at least four times by 1567. . . . The really significant point, however, is that Shakespeare added to the initial letter episode of "The Shepherdess Felismena" two striking elements, possibly suggested to him by De Duobus Amantibus: (1) the heroine, feigning wrath, tears the letter into pieces which she disdainfully throws down; and (2) the heroine lovingly retrieves the fragments which she caresses and kisses. Shakespeare could indeed have originated these additions, but the fact that they stand out as a unique and integrated artifice in a single play suggests his recourse to some earlier writer.[2]

Whether or not Shakespeare originated the activity centered around the letter can never be proved conclusively. The fact that he used the material on stage does show, however, his realization that this activity had histrionic possibility.

With these ideas in mind, he created the scene which shows Julia rejecting the love message with the same scorn of her prototype, Felismena, and later covertly

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[1] Ibid., pp. 72-73.

[2] Ibid., pp. 77-78

gathering up the torn pieces of the letter and kissing them. The activity is thoroughly entertaining and at the same time allows the audience to be intimately and secretly concerned with Julia and her love affair. Only the audience knows she kissed the pieces of the letter; Lucetta, her maid, is not present. When Lucetta first brings the letter to Julia, she berates her maid for "conspiring" against her youth.

> Jul. Now, by my modesty, a goodly broker!
> Dare you presume to harbour wanton lines?
> To whisper, and conspire against my youth?
> Now trust me, 'tis an office of great worth
> And you an officer fit for the place.
> There, take the paper. See it be return'd.
> (I, ii, 41-45)

As soon as Lucetta has departed, Julia wishes that she had forced Lucetta to read Proteus' note.

> What fool is she, that knows I am a maid
> And would not force the letter to my view,
> Since maids, in modesty, say 'no' to that
> Which they would have the profferer construe 'ay'!
> (I, ii, 53-57)

She calls Lucetta who enters and immediately stoops to pick up the paper which she has apparently just thrown on the stage. Julia is interested but does not want to admit her desire to read Proteus' lines.

> Jul. What is't that you took up so gingerly?
> Luc. Nothing.
> Jul. Why didst thou stoop then?
> Luc. To take a paper up that I let fall.
> Jul. And is that paper nothing?
> Luc. Nothing concerning me.
> (I, ii, 69-75)

They indulge in a wit contest on singing the written

material which Julia claims is a love note to Lucetta. They either sing their lines or hum a tune between lines, Lucetta trying to force Julia to read and Julia trying to assume indifference. Finally, she loses patience.

> This babble shall not henceforth trouble me.
> Here is a coil with protestation! [Tears the letter.]
> Go, get you gone; and let the papers lie.
> You would be fing'ring them to anger me.
> (I, ii, 98-101)

Lucetta leaves and Julia is left alone with the torn letter. She kisses the pieces; she endeavors to read from the scraps, discovers her name and dashes those pieces containing her name against the rocks. She finds Proteus' name on a scrap which she carefully hides in her dress. She searches for each tiny scrap anxious to preserve it, particularly anxious to find Proteus' name, and then kisses each tenderly.

> O hateful hands, to tear such loving words!
> Injurious wasps, to feed on such sweet honey
> And kill the bees that yield it with your stings!
> I'll kiss each several paper for amends.
> Look, here is writ 'kind Julia.' Unkind Julia,
> As in revenge of thy ingratitude,
> I throw thy name against the bruising stones,
> Trampling contemptuously on thy disdain.
> And here is writ 'love-wounded Proteus.'
> Poor wounded name! My bosom, as a bed,
> Shall lodge thee till thy wound be throughly heal'd;
> . . . . . .
> Lo, here in one line is his name twice writ:
> 'Poor forlorn Proteus, passionate Proteus,
> To the sweet Julia.' That I'll tear away;
> And yet I will not, sith so prettily
> He couples it to his complaining names.
> Thus will I fold them one upon another.
> Now kiss, embrace, contend, do what you will.
> (I, ii, 105-29)

Besides giving information vital to an understanding

of the play in the matter of character relationships, the scene reveals something of the nature of Julia, whimsical, proud, yet anxious for love, as well as the love-sickness of Proteus. It also establishes Lucetta as the stock character of the bold servant, officious and wise in the ways of the world.

Professor Charlton sees The Two Gentlemen of Verona as a romantic comedy using many of the traditions of the prose romances.[1] This fact gives further explanation to the long scene with the love letter.

> Like the heroine of romance, she will cover her first love-letter with kisses, and press the precious manuscript to her heart. But like the spirited independent young lady of the world, she will not expose herself to the chuckles of her maid by exhibiting the common symptoms of her affections. Hence the pretended contempt, and the struggle to keep up appearances, even at considerable risk to the sacred document.[2]

The scene, however, is devoted to entertainment. It inspires laughs, not the sharp laughter or ridicule or censure, but a laughter of sympathy for Julia's discomfiture. She wants to read the letter and she wants to ignore it. She wants Lucetta to give it to her, but she wants to seem impervious. She wants to view the letter unobserved. The audience smiles with moments of quiet sympathetic laughter. The scene is just off center from realistic rigidity, but

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[1] H. B. Charlton, Shakesperian Comedy (New York: Macmillan Co., 1938), p. 23ff.

[2] Ibid., p. 41.

it is human.

Later in the play, Act II, scene i, considerable entertainment develops from Silvia's request that Valentine write love letters for her. He has fallen madly in love with her, and although she loves him, she conceals her infatuation, again according to the romantic courtly love tradition. She commissions him to compose letters which she might then send to a loved one, supposedly another party. Valentine pours forth his love for her in writing the epistles, not realizing he is vicariously expressing her love for him. Speed has to make the jest clear to Valentine, and the audience.

> For often have you writ to her; and she, in modesty,
> Or else for want of idle time, could not again reply;
> Or fearing else some messenger that might her mind discover,
> Herself hath taught her love himself to write unto her lover.
>
> (II, i, 171-74)

The delicacy of Silvia's methods of wooing her loved one and the folly of Valentine give a light-hearted comic atmosphere to the play.

The poetic letter which the Duke of Milan discovers in Valentine's cloak is a truncated sonnet with the same expressions of love of the serious sonnet but in exaggeration. The rhythm attempts to be regular but becomes monotonously dull. The accent limps awkwardly, and with the excess of feminine endings it is obvious that the author is having fun with metrics to such an extent that even the

least poetic in the audience would smile at poor Valentine's efforts.

> My thoughts do harbour with my Silvia nightly,
> And slaves they are to me, that send them flying.
> O, could their master come and go as lightly,
> Himself would lodge where (senseless) they are lying!
> My herald thoughts in thy pure bosom rest them,
> While I, their king, that thither them importune,
> Do curse the grace that with such grace hath blest them,
> Because myself do want my servants' fortune,
> I curse myself, for they are sent by me,
> That they should harbour where their lord would be.
> (III, i, 140-50)

In Love's Labour's Lost much of the atmosphere of the play evolves from the letter device. That atmosphere was enjoyed by the Elizabethan audience, though perhaps not by an audience today, because it was created from fashions of speech, of verse, of interests of the period.

> There is much to be said for taking Love's Labour's Lost as his first comedy. It is assuredly his least substantial; and the one more than any other circumscribed by the fashions of his day. It is made of such stuff as a Tatler, a Bystander, or a revue-maker would offer us in ours. But as far as there is in it a colouring sentiment, it is the exuberant assertion of the high claims of romance, not only of its exalted ecstasies, but of the exclusive spiritual value of the romantic doctrine of love.[1]

Experimentation with the language, with verse forms, was a part of the popular thought; and satire of affectations of language was acceptable dramatic material.

> Here is a fashionable play; nor, by three hundred years, out of fashion. Nor did it ever, one supposes, make a

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[1] Ibid., pp. 45-46.

> very wide appeal. It abounds in jokes for the elect. Were you not numbered among them you laughed, for safety, in the likeliest places. A year or two later the elect themselves might be hard put to it to remember what the joke was.[1]

Don Armado's letter was dramatically enjoyable only because it was exaggeration. Its use as a satire of affectation in speech was noted in Chapter II. However, as a device for comic entertainment it also serves a purpose. It exposes Armado as a pompous soul, overly meticulous of the false standard of morality set up by Ferdinand, overly conscious of rhetoric. His wit lacks the genuine; hence his associates are Costard, Moth, Holofernes, Sir Nathaniel, and Dull. His first letter reveals the shocking information that he has discovered Jaquenetta and Costard together.

The second epistle by Armado is one of love for Jaquenetta. When Costard blunders and delivers Armado's letter to Rosaline and Berowne's to Jaquenetta, the love intrigues are soon discovered to the King. Armado, in his heavy-footed efforts to play the man of the world, the courtier, the lover, is portrayed for the audience clearly and effectively in his own expression. The author applies the concrete, objective evidence of the letter, but the language uses the unrealistic method of the cartoon--the result is comic.

> Armado. . . will never be encountered in the walks of

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[1] Granville-Barker, Prefaces to Shakespeare, II, 414.

> daily life. Yet there is in him more truth to human nature than in all the court society. He has no more claim to personality than have they, but he has more dramatic substance. He belongs to a race long established in the tradition of comedy. He is a first, a type of all vain glorious claimants to gentility, whose title-deeds are but excessive adoration of the tricks of fashion's choicest etiquette. No single member of his species was ever so extravagant as he: but he is a caricature and not a portrait.[1]

An audience may be anxious to see Armado exposed, but will wish to prevent Costard from exposing the good Berowne. Costard goes merrily on his way carrying the two letters, Armado's and Berowne's, which only the audience knows he has. As soon as the Princess receives the wrong one, suspense increases. Will Berowne escape exposure? He does not. However, that exposure comes in a most unexpected manner. Ferdinand and his lords are trapped simultaneously when they are overheard reading their own love sonnets.

The love sonnets of the King, Berowne, Longaville, and Dumain were written to be given to the ladies and perhaps could be included as letters. As poems they were dramatically entertaining to an age conscious of poetic expression. Since love had been outlawed by the King's decree, any written love communication must perforce be outside the bounds of law. The expression of love then becomes, within the framework of the story, illegal. The poems are a part of the artificiality of the basic problem--

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[1] Charlton, op. cit., p. 273.

four men who arbitrarily plan to adopt a hermit-like existence for several years for rather flimsy reasons. The four poems aid in expressing this artificiality, the unnatural vow of the King and his lords to renounce natural love. The sonnets, or love missives, highly artificial in expression, turgid in emotion, exaggerate on the side of the "natural," or love, as the vow does on the side of the "unnatural," or rejection of love.

The four sonnets and the problems evolved by these "illegal" love messages occupy most of the scenes ii and iii of Act IV. After the King, Longaville, and Dumain have been found guilty of breaking their vow, Berowne expects to berate them. Here the letter is again a means for much comic activity on the stage. Costard and Jaquenetta enter with Berowne's sonnet. While questioning the two, the King asks Berowne to read the paper.

King. Berowne, read it over.
[He reads the letter.]
Where hadst thou it?
Jaq. Of Costard.
King. Where hadst thou it?
Cost. Of Dun Adramadio, Dun Adramadio.
[Berowne tears the letter.]
King. How now? What is in you? Why dost thou tear it?
Ber. A toy, my liege, a toy! Your Grace needs not fear it.
Long. It did move him to passion, and therefore let's hear it.
Dum. It is Berowne's writing, and here is his name.
[Picks up the pieces.]
Ber. (to Costard) Ah, you whoreson loggerhead! you were born to do me shame.
Guilty, my lord, guilty! I confess, I confess.
King. What?

Ber. That you three fools lack'd me fool to make up
the mess.
He, he, and you--and you, my liege--and I
Are pickpurses in love, and we deserve to die.
(IV, iii, 195-209)

The device has given much of the comic atmosphere to the play and has finally become expedient in revealing to the audience that all have been in Berowne's own words "much out 'o th' way."

The poetic love messages of As You Like It, although not addressed and posted as the true letter, certainly can be classed with them as a means of conveying information from writer to reader. Their function in the play is of considerable importance, not only in furthering the interests of Orlando and Rosalind but in adding to the atmosphere of the play. Duke Senior gives voice to that pervading spirit of the play at the beginning of Act II. By then all the characters have met some particular difficulty which has forced them to journey toward the magic Forest of Arden. Rosalind and Celia accompanied by Touchstone are fleeing the threat of Duke Frederick. Orlando and old Adam wish to escape the evil designs of Oliver. The others, Duke Senior, Jaques, and the courtiers have already found refuge there.

Duke Senior. Now, my co-mates and brothers in exile.
Hath not old custom made this life more sweet
Than that of painted pomp? Are not these woods
More free from peril than the envious court?
. . . . . .
And this our life, exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything:

I would not change it.

(II, i, 1-19)

Here seems to be the idyllic life, far from the "envious court" amid friends and close to nature, where Love may persue its chosen path. This is Shakespeare's Arcadia portrayed with hearty Elizabethan realism. There is also an element of satire.

> Yet as a reader explores more deeply the meaning of the play, he finds in it much besides the high spirits and thoughtless gaiety of pure romance. Externally the setting is that of a conventional pastoral play.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> This is the place to which Orlando and Rosalind flee when driven away from society by injustice and tyranny. They hope to find in the Forest of Arden that life in accord with nature which they had read about in some Italian pastoral. The escapist return to nature was the theme of Sannazaro's Arcadia and of Tasso's Aminta. The authors of these works celebrate a natural habitat of dreamy indolence and idyllic freedom, where none of the restraints and artifices of society prevail.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> It is the Nature imagined by such writers that Orlando and Rosalind seek in the Forest of Arden. And what creatures do they find there? . . . . So are William and Audrey, neither of whom has ever been washed by the romantic imagination or any other known cleansing agent. They are the shepherd and his lass as they really are, ignorant dirty louts--simple folk who know nothing but what Nature has taught them. 'Here,' says Shakespeare, 'are two authentic children of Nature.' This is the heterogeneous company to which Rosalind and Orlando must belong if they prefer Arcadia to the artifices of civilized life. The play thus ridicules the belief that life close to Nature is best.[1]

Many view the total effect of the play as satirical. The Forest of Arden is to be seen only as a land where

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[1] Campbell, op. cit., p. 48.

winter winds blow strong, where lions stalk ready to pounce and draw blood, where dirty sheep herders roam. It is painted as an escape but at the same time as a sportive but bitter answer to all dreams of escape.

Others see the mature comedies of Shakespeare not as satiric but as poetic.

> Their main characters arouse admiration; they excite neither scorn nor contempt. They inspire us to be happy with them; they do not merely cajole us into laughing at them. . . .
>
> Its heroes (or heroines, to give them the dues of their sex) are voyagers in pursuit of a happiness not yet attained, a brave new world wherein man's life may be fuller, his sensations more exquisite and his joys more widespread, more lasting, and so more humane. But as the discoverer reaches this higher bliss, he (or rather she) is making his conquests in these realms of the spirit accessible not only to himself but to all others in whom he has inspired the same way of apprehending existence. He has not merely preserved the good which was; he has refined, varied, and widely extended it. Hence Shakespearian comedy is not finally satiric; it is poetic. It is not conservative; it is creative. The way of it is that of the imagination rather than that of pure reason. It is an artist's vision, not a critic's exposition.[1]

How then do the love letters give evidence in an examination of the tone of the play? Orlando, smitten with love for Rosalind after one meeting, sees no opportunity to attain his beloved; hence he resorts to writing poems in praise of her charms and hanging them on the trees of the forest. To a spectator at the playhouse then as now, this would seem a highly unsatisfactory procedure for

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[1] Charlton, op. cit., pp. 277-78.

furthering his cause--and a highly artificial activity. Yet it is illustrative stage activity and a necessary one, within the framework of the plot, to bring a meeting between the lovers. Rosalind, disguised as Ganymede, finds the poem, most fortuitously. Both activities, the hanging of the verses and the discovery of them amid all the trees of the forest, may call for an attitude on the part of the spectators other than satiric, perhaps the "willing suspension of disbelief."

Rosalind reads her paper to Touchstone,

> From the east to western Inde,
> No jewel is like Rosalinde.
> Her worth, being mounted on the wind,
> Through all the world bears Rosalinde.
> All the pictures fairest lin'd
> Are but black to Rosalinde.
> Let no face be kept in mind
> But the fair of Rosalinde.
> (III, ii, 93-100)

Touchstone very aptly characterizes the poem as a "false gallop of verses." When Rosalind claims she found them on a tree, he again assures her, "Truly the tree yields bad fruit." (III, ii, 122)

The extravagance of the figures in the verse may very well inspire variant emotional responses. Many could see only the brawny Orlando reduced to sublimating his hopeless love in the lover's exaggerated language, while others could see a playful parody of the "conceit" of early seventeenth century verse or of the verse love letters

exhibited in the letter-writers of the period. If so, the poem may well assist in underlining the satiric view seen as the tone of the play. The parody points up the general artificiality of the entire Arcadian never, never land. Touchstone's rather crude parody of Rosalind's poem strengthens this interpretation.

Celia enters with the love poem she has found on a tree. It is a thirty line poem of the sonnet rhyme full of "lame" feet, according to Rosalind. It is a naive poem, filled with even greater hyperbole.

> With all graces wide-enlarg'd.
> Nature presently distill'd
> Helen's cheek, but not her heart,
> Cleopatra's majesty,
> Atalanta's better part,
> Sad Lucretia's modesty.
> Thus Rosalinde of many parts
> By heavenly synod was devis'd.
> Of many faces, eyes, and hearts,
> To have the touches dearest priz'd.
> (III, ii, 151-60)

These are not the only letters Orlando has placed on the trees. Jaques asks Orlando, "I pray you mar no more trees with writing love songs in their barks." (III, ii, 276)

Is it satire of a current fashion in poetry or of a social ideal of pastoral escapism? Or is it a poet and dramatist giving his audience the opportunity to laugh at a youth filled with the emotion of love but not with the fire of poetry? Perhaps the fact that many can see it either way is Shakespeare's genius. The obvious satire of Jaques and

Touchstone lends credence to the interpretation of the play as typical of a mild satire, characteristic of the new satiric comedy of 1599.[1] Yet the importance of the love story and the excess of weddings attest to the tone of joyousness; it becomes a comedy of love.[2] To these views the letters give support. The audience may have its choice, each spectator satisfied, the test of the dramatic art. The letters have been the cause of much laughter, stage activity, entertainment.

> Play, music, and you brides and bridegrooms all,
> With measure heap'd in joy, to th' measures fall.
> (V, iv, 184-85)

In Twelfth Night, a play of approximately twenty-six hundred lines, nearly four hundred lines are devoted to writing, reading, and discussing letters. This number does not include lines which deal with activity of some sort resultant from the messages. Within the play three letters of vital import to the development of plot and characterization are likewise of considerable significance in the total dramatic effectiveness: the letter by Maria for Malvolio, Sir Andrew's letter to Viola, Malvolio's letter to Olivia.

Maria's famous epistle written to gull Malvolio in the groundwork for one of the best scenes in Shakespearean comedy if it is analyzed on the basis of dramatic

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[1] Campbell, op. cit., p. 45ff.

[2] Charlton, op. cit., p. 21.

art and sheer entertainment. From the scene the audience knows intimately the characteristics of Malvolio, Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Maria. Furthermore, the exposition and complication for one minor plot have been made with considerable suspense aroused. Since the character of Sir Andrew is also made clear, his actions in the subplot with Cesario (Viola) can be more fully appreciated. This information is imparted by a most concrete means--the letter. The audience is permitted to share in its original oral draft and its general tone in scene iii of Act II before Malvolio reads it in scene v. In fact, the paper is introduced as carefully as a protagonist.

> Maria. . . . For Monsier Malvolio, let me alone with him. If I do not gull him into a nayword, and make him a common recreation, do not think I have wit enough to lie straight in my bed. I know I can do it.
> . . . . . .
> Sir Toby. What wilt thou do?
> Maria. I will drop in his way some obscure epistles of love, wherein by the colour of his beard, the shape of his leg, the manner of his gait, the expression of his eye, forehead, and complexion, he shall find himself most feelingly personated. I can write very like my lady your niece; on a forgotten matter we can hardly make distinction of our hands.
> . . . . . .
> Sir Toby. He shall think by the letters that thou wilt drop that they come from my niece, and that she's in love with him.
> . . . . . .
> Maria. Sport royal, I warrant you. I know my physic will work with him. I will plant you two, and let the fool make a third, where he shall find the letter. Observe his construction of it. For this night, to bed, and dream on the event. Farewell.
> (II, iii, 143-93)

Fundamentally, the letter reveals Malvolio, although

he is the receiver, not the writer. It concretizes his folly. In Act I, scene ii, Malvolio has begun to reveal some of his officiousness when he throws the ring to Cesario (Viola) saying,

> Come, sir, you peevishly threw it to her; and her will is, it should be so return'd. If it be worth stooping for, there it lies in your eye; if not, be it his that finds it.
>
> (II, iii, 14-17)

The audience is aware that Olivia gave no such order to Malvolio.

> Olivia. Run after that same peevish messenger,
> The County's man. He left this ring behind him,
> Would I or not. Tell him I'll none of it.
> Desire him not to flatter with his lord
> Nor hold him up with hopes. I am not for him.
> If that the youth will come this way to-morrow.
> I'll give him reasons for't. Hie thee, Malvolio.
>
> (I, v, 318-24)

Malvolio's outline is being made distinct. His next lie is to Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, the Clown, and Maria when he catches them enjoying their "cakes and ale." Again he claims an authority apparently never given him.

> Mal. Sir Toby, I must be round with you. My lady bade me tell you that, though she harbours you as her kinsman, she's nothing allied to your disorders. If you can separate yourself and your misdemeanours, you are welcome to the house. If not, and it would please you to take leave of her, she is very willing to bid you farewell.
>
> (II, iv, 102-109)

Because he is so full of self-conceit and dignity, he sees all simple fun as exasperatingly trivial.[1] Dramatically

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[1] Campbell, op. cit., p. 84.

the audience is prepared to enjoy any discomfiture Malvolio may suffer. He has been the sound of law and social disapprobation which many have heard ending their fun-making.

Maria's wits are clear, and it is she who offers to deal with Malvolio. She knows his folly.

> Mar. The devil a Puritan that he is, or anything constantly but a time-pleaser; an affection'd ass, that cons state without book and utters it by great swarths; the best persuaded of himself; so cramm'd, as he thinks, with excellencies that it is his grounds of faith that all that look on him love him; and on that vice in him will my revenge find notable cause to work.
> (II, iii, 158-66)

She will bring illustrative action to aid in exposing him. The letter will reveal Maria intellectually superior to Malvolio, and to Sir Toby and Sir Andrew as well, since they could not have written so cleverly. In the three comedies, Much Ado About Nothing, As You Like It, Twelfth Night, the heroines are intellectually the equal of the men, a basic factor of high comedy.[1] Maria is an extension of that wit and acumen in the subplot.

In Act II, scene v, Maria places her counterfeit letter for Malvolio to find while Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Fabian hide. The preliminary plans given to the audience and the stage activity of this scene has attuned the emotions of the spectators for hilarious laughter. Malvolio enters thinking of Olivia's love for him; his self-love has blinded him until he has developed an ambition presumptuous

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[1] Charlton, op. cit., p. 285.

in one of his social position. Sir Toby's explosive "Fire and Brimstone," "Bolts and Shackles," when he hears Malvolio planning a life of gentlemanly authority with the Countess Olivia make all anxious to see Malvolio read the letter. Immediately he is taken in.

> By my life, this is my lady's hand! These be her very C's, her U's, and her T's; and thus makes she her great P's. It is, in contempt of question, her hand.
> . . . . . .
> 'I may command where I adore;
> But silence, like a Lucrece knife,
> With bloodless stroke my heart doth gore.
> M. O. A. I. doth sway my life.'
> (II, v, 95-118)

He is forced to rationalize with the M. O. A. I. but with his conceit he is well able to believe what he wants to believe.

> 'I may command where I adore.' Why, she may command me: I serve her; she is my lady. Why, this is evident to any formal capacity. There is no obstruction in this. And the end--what should that alphabetical position portend? If I could make that resemble something in me! Softly! M. O. A. I.
> . . . . . .
> This simulation is not as the former; and yet, to crush this a little, it would bow to me, for every one of these letters are in my name.
> (II, v, 126-54)

He reads the prose passage and the postcript. He is to appear cross-gartered in yellow stockings and smile. He fatuously makes his exit, "Jove, I thank thee. I will smile; I will do everything that thou wilt have me." (II, v, 195-96)

Strategy for the revenge in the exposure of Malvolio

has been planned, but for the unity of the play it must await Malvolio's next appearance. A comic situation has ensued affording much laughter through the letter device and it extends to a later scene allowing for suspense in the subplot while attention returns to the love story. It is the dual world of the romantic comedy, that of the true lovers of Illyria, and that of the realistic English characters baiting the major-domo Malvolio who thinks he can step out of his place.[1] He is to receive his punishment, incarceration in darkness, for his lack of sympathy with his associates, stemming from his conceit, a folly which the comedies condemn.[2]

In Act V, scene i, Olivia receives Malvolio's request that she release him from his captivity. The Clown brings the letter, and again it affords stage play.

> Oli. Open't and read it.
> Clown. Look then to be well edified, when the fool delivers the madman. [Reads in a loud voice.] 'By the Lord, madam'--
> Oli. How now? Art thou mad?
> Clown. No, madam, I do but read madness. An your ladyship will have it as it ought to be, you must allow vox.
> Oli. Prithee read i' thy right wits.
> Clown. So I do, madonna; but to read his right wits is to read thus. Therefore perpend, my princess, and give ear.
> Oli. [to Fabian] Read it you, sirrah.
> (V, i, 297-309

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1 Gordon, op. cit., p. 45ff.

2 Charlton, op. cit., pp. 290-91.

As soon as Fabian has read it without the implications of the Clown, Olivia realizes Malvolio has been misled and orders his release. Although the plot against him has been exposed, he leaves the stage swearing, "I'll be reveng'd on the whole pack of you." (V, i, 386) The whole comic subplot has been accomplished and resolved by the two letters.

Within the play another written communication has an important role in furthering the subplot of Sir Andrew and the main plot of the love story. Sir Andrew is also to be gulled, and the joke is arranged by means of the letter device. Sir Toby has led Sir Andrew to believe that he is to be the favorite of Olivia. When Sir Andrew sees Olivia giving more "favors to County's servingman than ever she bestow'd" on him, Sir Andrew blusters his rage. Sir Toby encourages him to write a letter of challenge to the servingman.

> Toby. Go, write it in a martial hand. Be curst and brief; it is no matter how witty, so it be eloquent and full of invention. Taunt him with the license of ink.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Fabian. We shall have a rare letter from him--but you'll not deliver 't?
> Toby. Never trust me then; and by all means stir on the youth to an answer. I think oxen and wainropes cannot hale them together. For Andrew, if he were open'd, and you find so much blood in his liver as will clog the foot of a flea, I'll eat the rest of th' anatomy.
> Fabian. And his opposite, the youth, bears in his visage no great presage of cruelty.
>
> (III, ii, 45-67)

All realize Sir Andrew's innate cowardice and the youth's (Viola's) obvious immaturity.

Soon Sir Andrew returns with his challenge, full of "vinegar and pepper." (III, iv, 158) Sir Toby reads it.

> Toby. Give me. [Reads.] 'Youth, whatsoever thou art, thou art but a scurvy fellow.'
> Fabian. Good, and valiant.
> Toby. 'Wonder not nor admire not in thy mind why I do call thee so, for I will show thee no reason for 't.'
> Fabian. A good note! That keeps you from the blow of the law.
> Toby. 'Thou cam'st to the Lady Olivia, and in my sight she uses thee kindly. But thou liest in thy throat; that is not the matter I challenge thee for.
> Fabian. Very brief, and to exceeding good sense--less.
> Toby. 'I will waylay thee going home; where if it be thy chance to kill me'--
> Fabian. Still you keep o' th'windy side of the law. Good.
> Toby. 'Fare thee well, and God have mercy upon one of our souls! He may have mercy upon mine, but my hope is better; and so look to thyself. Thy friend, as thou usest him, and thy sworn enemy,
> 'ANDREW AGUECHEEK.'
> (III, iv, 161-88)

Obviously poor Sir Andrew has little "blood in his liver." Realizing that the letter reveals the cowardly Sir Andrew and desiring the fun of a duel, Sir Toby decides not to deliver it but to give Cesario an oral challenge. "Now will I not deliver this letter. . . . this letter, being so excellently ignorant, will breed no terror in the youth. He will find it comes from a clodpoll." (III, iv, 210-07) Consequently, the unwilling duelists meet, only to be prevented from the fight by Antonio trying to protect Cesario (Viola) who he thinks is Sebastian. This occurrence leads

to the final resolution of the love story in the unmasking of the disguised Viola and the reuniting of Viola and her brother.

The Malvolio and the Sir Andrew episodes are somewhat parallel in technique. Both allow for much illustrative action, and through written evidence in their own handwriting Malvolio and Sir Andrew concretize their own characters. Comments on the letters by other characters increase the tension of the spectators beyond the rim of the stage as well as those on stage. The handling of the papers on stage and the long passages of written material being read necessitate careful attention. Each instance is a comic one pregnant with laughter, and the careful attention demanded seems to hold up that laughter until its release in an explosive, purging enjoyment.

A play which has entailed much discussion as to its authorship since Edward Ravenscroft's comment in 1687 is The Tragedy of Titus Andronicus. Ravenscroft reported a tradition that the play was by a "private author" and that Shakespeare "only gave some master-touches to one or two of the principal parts or characters."[1] This assertion was contrary to the evidence of Meres' list in Palladis Tamia and the First Folio.[2] Since Ravenscroft many have

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[1] Chambers, William Shakespeare, I, 316.

[2] Ibid., p. 244.

felt that the play was not Shakespeare's, especially Malone.[1] For the other side of the argument Professor Kittredge comments:

> Distaste for horrors ought not to make one regardless of the skilful construction of the play, of its dramatic power, and of the magnificence of many poetical passages. With all its faults, it is far beyond the abilities of either Peele or Greene. Shakespeare must have the credit as well as the discredit of its authorship.[2]

Most critics feel the barbarity and horror are too great for Shakespeare to have written, forgetting perhaps that the play was produced early in his writing career when he had much to discover about drama and when revenge tragedies of blood were popular.[3] It is possible that an examination of the letters used in the play may throw light on the controversy.

The first letter of significance in the play is the forged one which Aaron asks Tamora to give to the Emperor. Aaron has planned to arrange the murder of Bassianus and to throw the blame on Titus' sons. Aaron plants a bag of gold near the pit where the dead Bassianus is to be discovered.

> Seest thou this letter? Take it up, I pray thee,
> And give the King this fatal-plotted scroll.

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[1] The Works of William Shakespeare (Henley ed.; New York: P. F. Collier & Son Co., 1912), I, 189.

[2] Kittredge, op. cit., pp. 971-72.

[3] Baker, The Development of Shakespeare as a Dramatist, p. 124.

> Now question me no more. We are espied.
> Here comes a parcel of our hopeful booty,
> Which dreads not yet their lives' destruction.
> (II, iii, 46-51)

As soon as Bassianus and Lavinia enter, Aaron departs to bring Tamora's sons, "To back thy quarrels, whatso'er they be." (II, iii, 54) Chiron and Demetrius murder Bassianus and drag Lavinia away. Aaron enters with two sons of Titus and succeeds in getting them to fall into the pit. Immediately the Emperor arrives on the scene to discover in the pit the body of his murdered brother and the two sons of Titus. Tamora gives the Emperor the forged letter.

> 'An if we miss to meet him handsomely,
> Sweet huntsman--Bassianus 'tis we mean--
> Do thou so much as dig the grave for him.
> Thou know'st our meaning. Look for thy reward
> Among the nettles at the elder trees
> Which overshades the mouth of that same pit
> Where we decreed to bury Bassianus.
> Do this, and purchase us thy lasting friends.'
> (II, iii, 268-76)

The letter seems completely superfluous since it names no murderer. Saturninus accuses the sons of Titus on the evidence that they were in the pit with the body. Titus' sons do not have the gold and Aaron discovers it where it was hidden. It seems as if the author was merely toying with the letter device.

At another time in a short episode in Act IV, scene ii, Young Lucius comes with a gift of arrows from Titus to Chiron and Demetrius. Wrapped around one arrow in a Latin verse from Horace is a message of warning which

reveals that Titus now realizes that Aaron is the villain behind the treachery. The information is not significant and later in Act V, scene i, Aaron confesses.

Later in the play, however, the author makes effective use of the letter. In Act IV, scene iii, Titus has become mad. He has experienced grief upon grief: the deaths of his sons, his killing of his own son, the rape of his daughter, banishment, the treachery of the Emperor who returns Titus' own severed hand with the heads of the dead sons. What could be the expected result? In his grief and madness Titus turns to the gods for succour. He sends arrows into the air bearing letters to Jove, Mars, Apollo, Mercury, and others petitioning justice.

> And, sith there is no justice in earth nor hell,
> We will solicit heaven, and move the gods
> To send down Justice for to wreak our wrongs.
> Come, to this gear. You are a good archer, Marcus.
> (He gives them arrows.)
> Ad Jovem, that's for you. Here, Ad Apollinem.
> Ad Martem, that's for myself.
> Here, boy, To Pallas. Here, To Mercury.
> (IV, ii, 49-56)

When he requests Old Marcus, Young Lucius, and others to shoot the arrows, they yield to his distraught condition. This arrow-shooting scene is not used in any of the probable sources of the play, though it is referred to in a German play by the same name which may have been an adaptation from Shakespeare.[1]

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[1] Harold De W. Fuller, "The Sources of Titus Andronicus," Publications of Modern Language Association, XVI (1901), 9 and 34.

It has been pointed out that the mad scene of Titus was planned to capitalize on the success of Hieronimo in The Spanish Tragedy. Both are dominated by the thought of revenge; both rant about a descent into hell to look for the justice no longer on earth.[1] Also, the scene calls forth emotion akin to that inspired by comedy. The madness of Hieronimo has comic aspects, even grim humor in the hanging of Pedringano.[2]

The first letters show Shakespeare consciously making use of a device that could have dramatic appeal. In the mad scene, shooting the letters to the gods does contain dramatic effectiveness in making clear to the audience that Titus has endured more grief than a mind can bear. Characterization has been accomplished through action, a basic dramatic requirement.[3] The power of this scene, however, tends to be lost because of the extreme activity throughout the entire play and because of the intense emotional response which shifts in concentration from Titus to Tamora to Lavinia. The device of the letter may very well be the work of the same hand that wrote Love's Labour's Lost and The Two Gentlemen of Verona in which epistles figured quite prominently. It offers stage activity like the scene of

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[1] Thomas Marc Parrott, Shakespearean Comedy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949), pp. 193-96.

[2] Ibid., p. 196.

[3] Baker, Dramatic Technique, p. 283.

Julia kissing the torn pieces of the letter. It reveals characteristics of Julia, Berowne and courtiers, and Titus which each wishes to keep hidden. In The Tragedy of Titus Andronicus there is just enough of the comic to make for emotional tension in a highly tragic scene.

Two plays previously discussed in which the written word contributed to plot and character are The First Part of Henry the Fourth and The Tragedy of Hamlet. In Act II, scene iii, when Hotspur receives the letter telling of the defection in the group of those rebelling against the King, Hotspur is portrayed reading the letter and raging in condemnation at the apostasy. Although attention is centered on Hotspur, the message allows for overtones of the rebellion. Hotspur names Mortimer, Glendower, the Lord of York, and others as he strides around the stage waving the letter and fuming over its contents.

In Act IV, scenes vi and vii, when Horatio and the King read their letters from Hamlet, they have the spotlight focused on them. Yet the very fact that they are reading words of Hamlet brings him to the stage subconsciously for the audience. The scenes in those two plays become what S. L. Bethell calls further ramifications of multi-consciousness.[1] This multi-consciousness on the part

[1] S. L. Bethell, Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition (New York: Staples Press, 1948), pp. 108-37. I am indebted to Mr. Bethell for the idea of multi-consciousness. He did not, however, refer to the letter in his discussion.

of the audience is sensed by a good playwright. When Shakespeare used the letters in these plays and others, he was doing so with the intention of keeping vital influences and characters that are off-stage before the audience. He was thinking in terms of the psychologically dramatic.

CONCLUSION

Ever since distance has prevented immediate oral interchange, the epistolary form has been a vital medium for communication in the world of affairs. With the demand for its use, members of the higher classes from earliest times learned epistolography. Throughout the Middle Ages and early Renaissance the form was used not only for communication but also for the expression of matter now usually given to the essay or novel. Church scholars and the nobility learned the epistle form from the Latin masters. In the Middle Ages knowledge of the ars dictaminis was a requirement for princely attendants. Later, schools used the letters of Seneca, Cicero, Pliny the Younger, and others, as models for teaching the art.

In the Renaissance one of the tenets of humanistic effort was the widening of educational lines to reach beyond the confines of the church and castle. England of the sixteenth century felt this awakening and also felt the demands of an expanding economic system which gave to the middle class opportunity never before envisioned. That increase in commerce which gave birth to the merchant class made the merchants aware that for their businesses and increasing

social activities they needed to know how to communicate by letter. Merchants and others of the middle class required an epistolary form and style flexible enough for them to wield, not the style of the Latin masters. The answer to the demand was the formulary on letter writing, written in English. These handbooks, as those on manners, gardening, agriculture, appeared in numbers in the latter half of the sixteenth century. From the first these books carried as their purpose "to edifie the ignorant" or explained in their prefaces "written for any learners capacity." The earliest extant letter writer was published in 1568; from then until 1616, the date of Shakespeare's death, approximately forty of these formularies appeared.

Shakespeare began his writing career in less than twenty-five years after the first letter writer. That Shakespeare was acutely conscious of the increasing interest in letter writing in the late sixteenth century and early seventeenth century can be inferred from his many references to the letter. Such references give insight into the epistolary techniques of the period. He gives attention to the parts of the letter as the greeting, subscription, superscription, and farewell, even to the ink and seals used on letters. Such details concerning format add realism to his dramatic productions.

Besides the more than 180 references to letters, there are approximately 140 used in the plays. Of this

group 92 are certainly seen on the stage while others may have appeared in the hands of a character. It is known that 42 were read or paraphrased. These facts indicate that Shakespeare was consciously using a device well known to his audience. However, it would ignore the importance of the letter in the dramas to say that Shakespeare was merely capitalizing on a topical interest.

Before Shakespeare the letter had appeared in drama, and during his writing career other dramatists used the letter, but not to the extent he did. Why did this accomplished dramatist find the letter so useful? The answer must lie in the fact that he felt the device to be dramatically effective. Inquiring into this dramatic effectiveness has been the purpose of this study.

The letter allows for intimacy with the audience: the reading of a letter in the first person places the audience vicariously in the position of the recipient of the letter. Some of the problems of plot are solved many times through the use of the device; it appears as an aid in the exposition, complicating action, the turning point, the climax, the resolution. The letter becomes a means for compression and selectivity of details necessary for a clear and effective plot, sometimes speeding up or holding in abeyance information. It often introduces or conceals matter and thus engenders suspense. Off-stage action can be recapitulated with immediacy of effect. It facilitates

the successful handling of subplots and double plots. It has become a framework in some of the plays for much of the action.

Like the soliloquy and aside it reveals the innermost character, but it has power beyond that of the soliloquy or aside. The style of the letter, either forthright or veiled, characterizes the writer as thoroughly as a fingerprint can identify a man; and further, the comments of the recipient, when he is reading the letter, reveal him. It allows for the influence of an absent character to be felt in a scene when his letter is read. The spectators then enter creatively into the illusion of the stage for they must envision the absent one.

The style of his letters, sometimes satirical, sometimes comic, discloses the flexibility of the device in the hands of Shakespeare. He manipulates the style to express gaiety, satire, seriousness, love, evil; the messages contain laughter and tears. Letters appear in prose and verse, and with most of them the rhythm of context before and after the missive varies to give emphasis to the device.

The letter often causes much comic activity on the stage, much sheer entertainment. It becomes as vital as another character, for it has voice and movement. It has the power of the written word to which an audience must give even closer attention while it is being read. For that reason, emotional response, either motivated by comic or

tragic impulse within the letter, must be retained by the audience until the lines are read, only to explode in laughter or to react in pity and fear. Thus, the letter becomes an aid in setting the tone of the play.

Shakespeare realized the dramatic possibilities in the letter as a device, and it was for these reasons that he used and re-used it in his plays.

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APPENDIX

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